MISS NONENTITY

BY

L. T. MEADE

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'Delicious!' said Sarson. . . . 'Say some more, Little Miss Nonentity.'
PAGE 304.

Miss Nonentity

BY

L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF

'THE ODDS AND THE EVENS,' 'LIGHT O' THE MORNING,' 'THE GIRLS OF ST WODE'S,' 'BETTY: A SCHOOL-GIRL,' ETC.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY

W. RAINEY

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MISS NONENTITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE RANDALL SCHOLARSHIP.

CLARISSA RODNEY'S cheeks were very red, and her eyes bright. She walked at a swinging pace down the little High Street of the small town of Upton. Presently she paused at a door with a brass plate on it; on the plate were the words, 'Professor Rodney.' She ran up the steps and rang the bell.

'Mother will be pleased,' she thought, as she drew herself up, her eyes shining brighter than ever.

Almost immediately after the bell had sounded there came quick, eager feet down the stairs; they tripped along the hall, and the door was opened a few inches.

'Ah! it's you,' said a little girl inside the house. 'Come in softly, Clare. You must not go into the drawing-room at present; mother can't see you for a

bit. You're to come upstairs with me on tiptoe; you're not to make any noise.'

'But why? Is father worse?'

'I don't know whether he is worse or better; but Mr Russell is with mother.'

'In the drawing-room?'

'Yes. He's been there for over half-an-hour, and Kate has just taken tea in. I stood outside father's door and I heard him groaning. I don't suppose he is much better; but mother has been in the drawing-room with Mr Russell for quite half-an-hour—indeed, thirty-five minutes—I have measured by the clock.'

'Well, come along with me, Cissy,' said Clarissa; she stood still for a moment to get over a sensation of disappointment. 'I thought mother would be pleased; that it would make—would make—a difference.'

'Why, what is it?' said the little sister. She stepped back and gazed full up at Clarissa. 'Have you—have you gone and done it?'

'I have gone and *got* it,' said Clarissa. 'I have, Janet—I have.'

'Oh, Clare! Oh, let's both of us go into the dining-room and shut the door, and you can tell me. Sister Agnes is with father, so he does not want anything; and mother can't see you yet. Have you really?'

'I have really.'

'When did you find out?'

'Just at the end of school. I was going away when Miss Porter came in and said that Mr Chesney and Miss Harlington wanted to see me. I went into the big hall, and there were Miss Harlington and Mr Chesney and Mr Edridge; and Mr Edridge came forward—you know his pompous way—and said: "I

am happy to tell you, Clarissa Rodney, that you have won the great Randall Scholarship. It will be publicly announced to-morrow; but you would like to take the good news home to your parents." Those were his exact words. My head seemed to swim and the room to turn round; and then they all shook hands with me, and congratulated me; and Mr Edridge said: "This good news will please your father; and I trust he is much better."'

'What is the scholarship worth?' asked Janet.

'Worth? Why, forty pounds a year for three years. I wonder how soon they will pay me. I have heard no particulars. Oh, I did so fear I should lose it; but now I am quite safe.'

'So you are,' said little Janet. 'Fancy you having forty pounds a year of your own!'

'Yes; and I'll spend some of it on you, Janet. Come and kiss me, darling.'

Clarissa, quite worn out with excitement, sank down into the nearest chair. Janet rushed forward and flung her arms round her sister's neck.

'I am so delighted,' she cried; 'and mother will be pleased, and so will dad—that is when we can tell him.'

'It is stimulating,' said Clarissa. She tossed her hat off and gave Janet an affectionate hug. 'Yes,' she repeated, 'it is stimulating; it makes my dreams come true. It is very good for a girl like me when her dreams come true.'

'And this morning you thought you wouldn't get it,' said Janet.

'You small kid, I have been in an agony of fear. I wanted to know, and yet I dreaded to know. Quite a

dozen of us were up for it—especially Martha Moore; Martha is twice as clever as I am.'

'That she is not,' said little Janet.

'Oh yes, Janey, she is. How she failed I cannot guess. She looked very gloomy when I told her. Miss Harlington said it was to be publicly announced to-morrow. But Miss Porter had got hold of the news, and what did she do but drag me into the schoolroom, and say before all the girls: "I cannot keep it back; I really cannot. I am proud to introduce to you the successful competitor for the Randall Scholarship." Oh, the Simpsons did look black, and poor Martha turned very white; but afterwards Annie Garnet and Mary Spicer came up and shook hands with me; and of course the school cheered me ever so often. It is a very great thing if our school wins that scholarship. Miss Porter said to me as I was going away: "This is important for you, Miss Rodney. This will make a great difference—will it not?" "I think so," I said, but I hated her to make the remark. It's horrid to be looked down upon. Oh, I do trust and hope father will soon be better, and that our circumstances will improve. There, kiddy, I cannot waste any more time with you now. I must run upstairs and wash my face and hands. Do you know, I am faint with hunger? I wish Kate could smuggle up an egg for my tea.'

'I'll see to it; you deserve it. I am proud of you,' said little Janet.

Clarissa went softly upstairs. She paused for an instant on the drawing-room landing. The house in the High Street which Professor Rodney and his family occupied was an imposing one. It was a

square house, built of stone; it had been built nearly a hundred years ago, and there were rambling old passages and wide landings and lofty rooms. One of the rooms now had a curtain across the doorway; and as Clarissa bounded up the stairs, a girl about ten years older than herself, in a nurse's dress, came and stood on the landing and put her finger to her lips.

'Hush!' she said. 'He is asleep.'

'Is he better?' asked Clarissa.

'No.'

Clarissa started back, and it seemed to her that her throbbing, exultant heart went down into her boots.

'May I sit with him, Sister Agnes?'

'No, not to-night. Mr Russell has just been here, and is gone.'

'Why did he come? Why did he go?' asked Clarissa.

'Hush! Your father has been arranging his affairs.'

'Then, that means'—— said the girl. She turned white even to the very lips.

'We hope it means nothing; arranging one's affairs cannot hurry a soul out of the world one second before God's own time; but you will understand that your father must have no further excitement to-night. What is the matter with you? You don't look well.'

'I was well—as well as could be—a few minutes ago. I have great news. Sister Agnes, you are not intellectual.'

'Why do you say that?'

'I mean you don't take up that line; but even you must be glad to know that I have got the'——

'Hush, child! I cannot listen to you. He is stirring.'

Sister Agnes turned and went into the sick-room; she closed the door softly behind her.

Clarissa felt as if hope had vanished behind that curtain. She doubled up her strong, capable hand and shook it in the direction of the curtain.

'I hate Sister Agnes. Why should she keep me away from father? I hate her; she has got no heart.' Clarissa stood still for a moment; then she rushed upstairs as fast as she could. Entering her own room, she shut the door with a bang, and flung herself, sobbing and quivering, on her knees by the bedside. She was a great, strong, tempestuous creature, with a big heart and a keen intellect; and she had never been broken-in in any way. This was her first trouble, and she could not suppress her grief. How very puzzling and bewildering that trouble should come on the very day of her grand success —the great success of her life! It was cruel—very cruel.

'Just for the cup to reach my lips, and then be dashed away,' she thought. 'Sister Agnes, if she did not say the words "No hope," certainly looked them; I don't believe I shall have father long.'

These thoughts had scarcely passed through her mind before the door was opened, and Mrs Rodney came into the room. She was a thin, faded-looking woman, with washed-out brown eyes which had once been as radiant and keen and full of colour as Clarissa's own. Her cheeks were sunken. Her hair grew high on her forehead, and receded on her temples. She laid her hand on the girl's arm. 'Get up,' she said. 'What is the matter with you?'

'Oh, mother! Nothing.'

'What are you crying for?'

'Nothing, mother.'

'Why did you bang the door? You shook the whole house. Your father was dropping asleep; you woke him. Sister Agnes is very angry.'

'Mother, darling, I didn't mean it—I didn't mean it,' said Clarissa, with another great sob. Then she stood up quietly, looking straight at her mother.

Mrs Rodney crossed the room to the window, and looked out.

'I wish you would learn thoughtfulness, Clarissa,' she said. 'You are a very good girl, and of course I depend on you a great deal; but you will never be thoughtful. You always'——

'Don't scold me, mummy. Mother, perhaps you will be interested. I have got it.'

'Got what?'

'The scholarship — the biggest of all, mother. Twelve of the best scholars competed, and I have won. None of them came near my marks; and, mother, the scholarship is forty pounds a year'——

Clarissa spoke to an empty room. Mrs Rodney, hearing a stir downstairs, had vanished.

'Well, that's the last straw,' thought the girl. 'Even mother does not care.'

CHAPTER II.

HE WILL TELL ME THE TRUTH.

'CLARE, it 's quite a fresh egg, and there 's a toasted muffin too. The muffins were got in for Sister Agnes—she likes them for her tea; but Kate smuggled one away for you. Come downstairs now; do you greatly mind having your tea in the kitchen?'

'Why in the kitchen, dear?'

'Because mother is fussing about. Mr Russell has only just gone, and mother says that the doctor will come and stay all night. A special dinner is to be laid for him in the dining-room; and—— Oh, you 're fit to drop, you darling. As you have won such a big thing you must be petted; and Kate has laid the dearest little table just up in the bay-window in the kitchen, and no one will look at you while you eat.'

'Why, it will be quite lovely,' said Clarissa, recovering her spirits on the spot. 'Yes, of course I 'll come. Oh, I am so hungry.'

She was hungry. Her schoolgirl appetite had not been appeased for many hours. At the thought of a fresh egg and a muffin she forgot her disappointment at the attitude of her mother and Sister Agnes, and forgot, also, that a dark cloud was hanging over the

house. She rushed downstairs, Janet following her, to the kitchen regions, where Kate and the cook gave them both a hearty welcome. Clarissa ate her egg and finished every crumb of the muffin; then she was regaled with a jam tartlet, the cook bringing her this dainty straight out of the oven.

'I am glad you are eating it,' said the cook. 'I daren't have given it to you if you had been upstairs; the missus would have been wild. I am always making these fussy sort of things for Sister Agnes. She's so particular about her food; and if she isn't kept in a good humour, why, the master suffers, and that won't do.'

'Mary,' said Clarissa, as she ate up her tartlet, and turned with her keen, bright eyes to the red-faced cook, 'you don't think father is in danger?'

'In danger is it, honey? Not a bit of it. His illness is just having a turn, and the turn is rather serious; but he'll be as right as ever afore a week is out. Haven't I dreamt it, dear; and do Mary's dreams ever go wrong?'

'But Sister Agnes thinks, and the doctor thinks, and mother thinks'——

Cook interrupted Clarissa with a scornful laugh.

'If twenty of 'em took the trouble to think, I'd still hold on to my dreams,' she said. 'My dreams tell me that the Professor will be as well as ever he was, and I believe 'em. They say that the Professor will never die in his bed; that he'll die somewhere in his boots. Do you think that I don't hold with my dreams? You listen to me, Miss Clarissa. Them doctors think they know a lot that's hidden from 'em. God Almighty don't mean 'em to see everything; and many a plain

truth comes to me in my dreams that the doctors know nothing of. The master will die maybe in a railway accident, but not in his bed; so don't you worry, honey.'

'But really,' said little Janet, who was standing close to Clarissa, 'your dreams are almost as bad as the other thing, Mary. It would be awful to think of father being killed in a railway accident.'

'I don't say that he will,' replied Mary. 'I only know what my dreams tell me—that he 'll die in his boots. Now then, Miss Clare, if you have eaten up all that tartlet, maybe you and little miss will leave the kitchen. It would be as much as my place is worth if the missus found you here.'

'Do you believe in dreams?' said Janet, squeezing her sister's hand as they went quietly upstairs to the dining-room.

'I do, and I don't,' said Clarissa. 'When I am with Mary I believe them; when I am with mother and Sister Agnes I don't.'

'I believe 'em always,' said Janet, 'always and always, day and night. I wish I could have a dream about father; then I 'd know the truth.'

'Stop,' said Clarissa; 'I have got a thought. Come in here, kiddy.'

She drew Janet into a small room at the back of the dining-room. It was a dark and dismal room in the daytime; but at night, when the gas was lit, it was cheerful enough. This was Clarissa's own private apartment; she kept all her treasures here. It was a somewhat unsavoury abode, for the girl had all kinds of odd tastes, and kept mice and goldfish and birds in the room; and as she seldom allowed the window to be

opened on account of the draught affecting the birds, or the door to be opened for fear the cat should come in, the room was often insufficiently aired, and the odours caused by the mice were not of the sweetest. But what will not enthusiastic girls do and suffer for the sake of the pets they adore? Neither girl now noticed that the room was close and yet cold, and that the mice seemed more aggressive in their unsavoury odours than usual.

'Yes,' said Janet; 'yes. What is it you want to say, Clare?'

'You've been watching all day—haven't you, kiddy?'

'Of course I have; but mother did try to banish me. I wish mother wouldn't get so cold to you and me because father is ill.'

'It will break her heart if he dies,' said Clarissa. 'He must not die.'

'But if God wills it?' said little Janet.

'He does not will it. Didn't you hear what old Mary said, that father was to die in his boots?'

'I don't think,' said Janet, 'that God would tell Mary. Why should He?'

'Why shouldn't He?' said Clarissa.

'Well, of course, why shouldn't He? repeated Janet. 'Clare, how your eyes are shining!'

'I want to know,' said Clarissa. 'You and I are kept in the dark; the whole house is full of mystery. Mr Russell and mother and Sister Agnes are hiding something, and father is hidden away from us both. I want to get to the bottom of it all; I want things to be cleared up. When I am at school I don't think quite so much of the dreadful things happening at

home; but when I am here they just haunt me. Why, I had forgotten that scholarship even.'

'You can't, when you speak of it to me.'

'Oh, that's nothing. I have forgotten all the good part of it. It does not give me any joy; my heart doesn't beat a bit quicker, and I don't feel as if I could jump or skip. I'm just as I was yesterday, only a little worse. I have won the scholarship. I thought yesterday that it meant everything; now, having succeeded, I find that it is nothing. Mother did not even listen; I told her, and she went out of the room. You are the only person pleased; nobody else cares. I could cry; but what's the use? If I knew about father I would bear up. I always felt that there was something in me which could stand up against trouble; but when I am not told the truth I don't know what to think or what to do—it's all miserable.'

'Let's go and ask mother this minute,' said Janet.

'What's the use? She won't tell us; she will only say we are thoughtless and selfish. But, Janet, you have been about all day and listening?'

'Not exactly listening,' said Janet, colouring somewhat painfully, 'although I did stand outside the curtain just for a quarter of a minute when Dr Bennett paid his last visit to father, and I got behind a door when he went downstairs. His back looked grave; I couldn't see his face.'

'I'll see his face, I'm determined,' said Clarissa, 'before I go to bed to-night.'

'How can you? Mother never gives us a chance.'

'I'll see him before mother does. She is sure to be upstairs in father's room.'

'Yes; she always watches by father from nine until past midnight,' said Janet the practical.

'Well, let 's make a plan,' said Clarissa. 'Dr Bennett is coming to spend the night here?'

'Yes.'

'You don't happen to know when he will come?'

'About half-past nine, I think.'

'It 's hours to that yet, unfortunately; but still it will come—it will come if we have patience. Janet, you are not to go to bed early.'

'Oh, I am all right,' said Janet, winking her big bright eyes. 'I like staying up.'

'Mother must think you have gone to bed. You are to go up to your room and pretend to go to bed.'

'All right,' said Janet.

'But you are not to go. You are to come downstairs when mother is well established in father's room, and that horrid Sister Agnes has shut herself in her room, and you are to hide in the hall, and the very instant you hear Dr Bennett's step, before he has time to ring the bell, you are to open the door to him.'

'How am I to know his step?'

'You 'll have to listen hard; you have often told me you were good at sounds.'

'Oh, I am very, and I think I know his step; it is firm, and he always runs up the three steps.'

'Then listen for the man who runs up the three steps, and let him in before he rings—do you hear?'

'I hear,' said Janet. 'It 's most exciting.'

'If he rings, Kate will come and open the door; and if she sees me talking to him she will go and tell mother. We must prevent that. I want to see him.'

'And when you do, what will you say?'

'Take him in here and shut the door behind him, and say, "Dr Bennett, I must know the truth." He will tell me,' said Clarissa. 'He won't refuse to satisfy me, and then, kiddy, you and I will know how to act.'

CHAPTER III.

'I CANNOT DISREGARD YOUR FATHER'S WISH.'

THE daring plan devised by Clarissa was carried out to perfection by the practical Janet. Janet was a most loving, affectionate child of ten. She had more nerve, in some respects, than Clarissa, and was not so much afraid of her mother; therefore, on emergencies, she could act with great coolness and precision. She went up to bed with the air of the best little girl in the world, said her prayers with perfect calmness, washed her face and hands, and smoothed out the bed-clothes; but no further preparations were made. She only slipped the coverlet off the bed, then got in, and laid her little round head on her white pillow; next she put out the candle, and lay perfectly quiet. Janet knew she would have to stay quiet for the best part of an hour before venturing downstairs; for Mrs Rodney would not go to her husband's room till about a quarter to nine; therefore Janet could not possibly go downstairs to take up her position as watcher in the hall until her father's door was quietly closed, and Sister Agnes—whom the girl cordially detested—was heard going to her own room. Janet found it hard to keep awake, and her

thoughts—although they were not as full of fear as Clarissa's—were sufficiently anxious to make her sad and lonely. The one thing to which she clung with absolute comfort was the dream of Mary the cook—the dream that father was to die in his boots.

'I'll hide all his boots to-morrow,' thought Janet, 'and then he cannot die. Oh dear, I wish the time would go.'

Even this slow hour did pass away, and Mrs Rodney duly shut herself up in her husband's room as head-nurse, and Sister Agnes went to her room.

'It is safe now,' thought Janet, as she tumbled out of bed and hurried downstairs. She had taken off her shoes, so her little feet made no sound on the carpet.

Clarissa, looking pale and cross, with red patches on her cheeks, was peeping round the door of her own special sitting-room, in which the gas was burning.

'The room doesn't look so dusty when the gas is lit,' she whispered to her little sister. 'It will soon be half-past nine; he is sure to be punctual. The last post has come, and no one else will dream of coming to the door. You must stand with your hand on the handle, and listen for all you're worth.'

Janet nodded, and rushed to her post as watcher. In a short time the expected steps were heard; and before Dr Bennett had time to ring the bell the little girl had the door wide open.

'Come in softly,' she said; 'very softly, please.'

'Why so? Is he worse?' asked the doctor.

'I don't know; it's Clarissa wants to see you. Clare, here he is.'

'Come at once,' said Clarissa. She stretched out her hand and took the doctor's.

'You can go to bed, Janet,' she said to her sister.

Janet turned away with a crimson face and anger in her heart. She had done her duty skilfully; she had got the doctor into the house so that no one should hear him, and now she was to be sent off to bed. It was hard of Clarissa.

'Go to bed; I'll come to you presently,' said Clarissa. Then Janet did go upstairs, a little comforted but not satisfied.

'What is the meaning of this?' said Dr Bennett, when he found himself face to face with Clarissa in the small, unwholesome back sitting-room. 'Dear me, what a very unpleasant smell! What do you keep here?'

'Never mind about the smell,' said Clarissa; 'that's all right.'

'I assure you it is nothing of the kind; it is all wrong. What do you keep here? You ought not to sit in a room like this. Let me open the window.'

'Not for worlds,' said Clarissa; 'it will give Bully asthma.'

'Bully! Who is he?'

'My darling bullfinch. Please don't mind the smell. Do let me speak to you.'

'I must go to my patient. I cannot stay unless you require me for something very special.'

'It is very special,' said Clarissa; 'it's life or death —that's what it is.'

'Life or death,' muttered Dr Bennett. 'Why should you talk in that intense way? Little girls like you'——

'Little girl indeed,' said Clarissa; 'remember I am sixteen.'

'Even so, I consider you quite a little girl.'

'I'm head of the school anyway. I have just got the scholarship.'

'Have you indeed—the Randall Scholarship?'

'Yes.'

'Let me congratulate you. This will be pleasant news for your father, poor fellow, when'——

'Dr Bennett, that's what I want to ask you—it's about father. The scholarship doesn't matter. Nothing matters. It's only father I'm interested in.'

'Well, child?'

'And mother won't tell me, and Sister Agnes won't tell me; but I want the truth. You shall tell me; you must—you shall.' The girl clenched her hands, and the crimson in her cheeks grew vivid and her eyes bright. She went close to Dr Bennett, and looked him in the face. 'You shall tell me,' she cried. 'I won't be treated as a baby. Is father'——

'Well?' asked the doctor. 'Well?'

'Is father to live or is he to die?'

'My dear Clarissa, my dear little girl, sit down. You are trembling; you are not well. Sit down.'

'I won't. I can't. You must—you shall—speak.'

There was a slight sound upstairs, the sound of a dragging step which began slowly to descend the stair.

Clarissa gave a cry. 'It's mother, and she will prevent me. You shall tell me, you shall. I'll scream if you don't. I can't stand it any longer; this suspense is awful.'

The dragging step on the stairs sounded nearer.

'You shall tell me,' repeated Clarissa.

'Hush!' said Dr Bennett—'hush! I will come

back in a moment. I must go and speak to your mother.'

'She won't let you come back. Oh, it is all lost. If you would only tell me.'

But Dr Bennett had opened the door and gone out.

'So you have come,' said Mrs Rodney in a surprised tone. 'I thought I heard voices. May I ask who you are talking to?'

'Your eldest daughter, Clarissa. She is not well. I will be with you in a few moments.'

'You must come at once. Of course Clarissa is quite well; I can attend to her. He seems very weak.'

'I'll be with you in a moment. There can be no imminent change. Will you go upstairs, please? I will speak to your little daughter; she must be soothed.'

Clarissa, listening at the other side of the closed door, held her breath with anxiety. Would her mother insist on hurrying Dr Bennett behind that heavy curtain before he told her what she anxiously desired to know, or would the doctor's words prevail?

The next instant she had given a sigh of ecstasy, as the slow and heavy steps were heard ascending, and the doctor returned to the unwholesome room.

'Now,' he said, 'you must be very quick. Your father wants me immediately.'

'I will try to be quick. It is difficult, but I will try. Dr Bennett, is my father in danger?'

The doctor's expression showed that he was displeased or uneasy. He was evidently unwilling to be questioned. The straight lips shut firmly, and the direct gray eyes were fixed on Clarissa's face.

Drawing himself slightly up and facing her, he stretched out one hand and laid it on the handle of the door.

Clarissa knew that he was about to say something, and then withdraw from the room. She was afraid he would leave before the question she had asked was answered; so, with a quick movement, she ran and stood with her back to the door, pushing the doctor aside as she did so.

'I am not going to be afraid of you,' she said. 'Is my father in danger?'

'There are symptoms,' said the doctor then slowly, 'which'——

'Go on, please. Don't go round it, but go straight at it. Speak straightforwardly and tell me exactly what is going to happen.'

'There are symptoms,' repeated the doctor, raising his hand as if to ward off something, 'which I do not like, but which a specialist—a very great specialist—might avert.'

'Now, you are puzzling me extremely,' said Clarissa. 'I know most things that a girl of sixteen ought to know; but what do you mean by a great specialist?'

'A man who makes a study of a certain science, art, or trade, so deeply and so thoroughly that he knows more about it than most of his fellowmen. Your father is suffering from a somewhat obscure disease, which is giving him very great agony and terrible weakness. There is a man in town who has made that disease his special study; if he saw your father he might suggest something to alleviate and cure, and his life might be spared.'

'Then why doesn't he see him?' said Clarissa. She

With a quick movement, Clarissa ran and stood with her back to the door.
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left her position near the door now, and came up to Dr Bennett. 'What awful madness this is,' she said. 'If there's a man who can cure father, why doesn't father see him?'

'I have begged your father to do so, and have assured him that if all the circumstances of the case were known Sir John Carbery would come here for a small fee.'

'But what do fees matter?' interrupted Clarissa. 'Send for him at once—at once. It is life or death. Please send for him at once.'

'I cannot do so, for your father forbids me. I spoke to him very gravely about the whole matter yesterday. He said, "Sir John Carbery's visit would cost from thirty-five to forty guineas. I will not have that spent on a mere chance." Miss Clarissa, I cannot disregard your father's wish. I'll do my best to pull him through, not only for your mother's sake and for yours and your little sister's, but for his own; he is one of the best, the most excellent men I have ever met. Now, you must not keep me another moment. I only wish to tell you clearly that it is impossible for me to disregard your father's wishes.'

With these last words Dr Bennett pushed Clarissa gently aside and went out of the room, closing the door behind him. She heard him going upstairs, and then she fell on her knees and raised her tearful face to heaven.

'Please, God, show me a way,' she cried. 'The great, great doctor must come. Please, God, show me a way.'

CHAPTER IV.

'SHE LITTLE KNOWS.'

JANET and Clarissa slept in the same room. It was late; but Janet's eyes were wide open as she peeped at Clarissa out of the big bed. Clarissa came noisily into the room, put her candle on the chest of drawers, and began to undress.

'Well?' said Janet.

'What are you lying awake for, kiddy? You know it is very bad for you; you'll be stupid over your lessons to-morrow, and you'll go down a place in class.'

'I don't care. What a funny look you have got on your face! Is anything the matter?'

'I have got both good and bad news. I have got the truth out of the doctor.'

'Well, do say. They have been moving about so much downstairs that I have been terrified. Do say.'

'Father is ill, but I don't think he is dying, at least not at present; and the case is not hopeless. That is the news. It is bad enough, but it might be worse.'

'I don't see that it is so very good,' said Janet; 'but I wish you'd tell me more particulars.'

'I don't know them myself, kiddy. Shall I get into bed and talk to you further?'

'Do if you like.'

'I am rather cold,' said Clarissa. 'I am trembling all over. I don't want to give way.'

'Come into bed,' said Janet, 'and I'll snuggle up to you and put my arms round your neck. It's a great comfort—isn't it, Clare?—that you and I have one another. We are often rather lonely—aren't we? But when we are together we are never lonely.'

'That is quite true, darling.'

'It's because mother is so cold,' continued Janet. 'I know she is the very best of mothers—every one says so; and she keeps the house in such perfect order, and makes the money go so far. Father says there never was such a wife; but why doesn't she—why doesn't she sometimes—oh, I wish she would—even cry?' said little Janet. 'I wish she would even scold, but she is just'——

'Don't speak against mother; it isn't right,' said Clarissa. 'I have felt cross with her; but I don't feel cross to-night. I have got a plan in my head.'

'What is that?'

'Wouldn't it be grand?' said Clarissa.

'What would be grand?'

'If *I* pulled father round.'

Janet, who had crept up close to Clarissa, and was about to put her arms round her neck, instead of doing so laid one soft, small hand on her sister's forehead.

'Have you a very bad headache?' Janet asked. 'Are you talking nonsense? Aren't you a little bit queer, Clare?'

'No, I'm not queer at all; I am talking in sober earnest. The doctor said that father is suffering from something which even he does not quite understand; and he says, too, that there is a great man in London who might be able to cure him, but father has not got money enough to pay for the great man to come and visit him. Now, I tell you what I mean to do. I mean to spend some of my scholarship on getting this great doctor to see father. I mean to do it. I stayed in the room with the birds and the mice, and thought it all out. I mean to do it at once.'

'But how can you?'

'Remember, it is forty pounds a year. I'll have to ask one of the Governors to let me have all one year's money at once. Of course he'll do it. I may not get it for a month; but I think I can manage that. I shall spend the money on the great doctor. He will come and see father, and father will get well.'

'It does sound exciting,' said Janet. 'When is he to come?'

'That is the thing that puzzles me most. He ought to come immediately, and I don't believe I can trust Dr Bennett. Dr Bennett might refuse me, and I do not wish to run the risk. I must see Sir John Carbery—that is the name of the specialist—and I must promise to pay him. I have planned everything. Dr Bennett will be surprised, and mother too; but I will see Sir John and tell him that he is only to say to Dr Bennett, "A friend sent me," and they will never guess, Janey, that I am the friend—never. You'll keep it an awful secret—won't you, Janey?'

'That I will. I do think, Clare, you are about the noblest girl in all the world.'

'Oh, I am nothing of the sort,' replied Clarissa; but she had a pleased sensation about her heart when her little sister praised her, and she pressed up closely to the warm little figure and allowed the comfort of Janet's sympathetic presence to go through her.

'There is one thing that puzzles me,' she said. 'I must go to London to see the doctor, and I have not got the money.'

'No more you have. What is to be done?' said Janet. 'It will cost many shillings to go to London —won't it?'

'It takes two hours to go from here to London, and the return journey third-class will cost fifteen shillings. I looked it all up in the ABC time-table before I came upstairs. A train leaves here at ten o'clock in the morning, and it reaches London at twelve. I shall drive straight to the doctor's house, and beg of him to come down if possible to-morrow, for there really is not an hour to be lost. I can manage the whole thing in school-hours, and mother will not know. Of course I shall be punished at school the next day; but what does that matter? In about a month's time, or perhaps sooner, they will give me my forty pounds, and I'll send the necessary money to Sir John Carbery. I will tell him quite frankly that I mean to pay him in about a month, and I am certain he will wait that time, for doctors are always so kind. Now, the one puzzling thing that you and I have got to do before we sleep to-night, Janet, is to think out some way of getting the fifteen shillings.'

'There's money in the missionary-box—plenty,'

replied Janet. 'Do you think it would be wrong to take it?'

'Of course it wouldn't,' answered Clarissa; 'it is a splendid thought of yours, and it settles everything. Mother won't know, and when I get my scholarship money I'll be able to pay back what I borrowed. I shall want a little more than the fifteen shillings, so I will take a sovereign. Dr Bennett said when he was talking about Sir John Carbery that his fee would probably be thirty-five guineas, so there will be enough over to pay for everything else. Oh dear, I do feel happy. What a grand, magnificent thing it is that I got the scholarship.'

'Yes, it is quite grand,' said little Janet.

The girls talked for some time longer. Hope was sitting rosy and joyous at the foot of their bed, and they did not guess or even think of any difficulties ahead. Presently they both dropped off to sleep, and in the morning were greeted by the information that their father had spent a slightly better night, and that Dr Bennett had gone home.

Clarissa hastily rose and dressed. Janet followed her example.

'Now, Janey,' said the elder sister, 'whatever happens you must keep your own counsel. You must not get a sort of confused look on your face when the great doctor's visit is spoken of afterwards. You know you often do look very silly, and as if you were bursting with the whole secret; you must not have that sort of look, and you must on no account turn red.'

'It's one of my awful trials that I do get so perfectly scarlet,' said Janet. 'I get flushed almost for

nothing if mother happens to look at me when I think she is going to be displeased about anything; in especial, if mother is thinking down deep in her heart that I have done something naughty, even though I have not done the naughty thing, I do flush up so—it's perfectly dreadful—and then mother is certain sure I have done it. I'd best get out of the room when the doctor is talked of; that's the only thing for me to do.'

'It is a very tiresome habit, and you ought to break yourself off it,' said Clarissa.

Janet gave a sigh. 'I would if I could,' she replied. 'I'd like to consult a doctor about it—I'd like to ask him if there is a cure for getting scarlet when you don't want to get scarlet. Do you think he'd laugh?'

'Of course he would, kiddy. It's just because you are nervous. You must not be nervous any more; and you have got to keep my secret.'

Janet gave another sigh, and proceeded with her toilet. 'What about the missionary-box?' she asked as she was preparing to leave the room.

'You had better fetch it.'

'It's in father's dressing-room. How am I to get in?' asked Janet.

You must go in, and you must take it, and you must be quick. You must put it back again afterwards. I'll have to open it and take out the money, and I must be very sharp. School begins at nine, and it's nearly eight now.'

Janet slipped downstairs.

The missionary-box was quite an institution in the family. Every Sunday money was dropped into it.

Whatever else was neglected on the day of rest this little observance, started by Mrs Rodney when the children were very young, was never forgotten. The missionary-box held sixpences and shillings, and even half-crowns; and always at the beginning of the winter it was opened, and the collection sent to the missionaries. The children had come to regard the missionary-box with a sort of awe; they would as soon neglect to eat their dinner as to put their offering through its narrow slit. It always stood on the top of the chest of drawers in father's dressing-room.

Janet ran into the room now. She was just going to see her father, when the nurse came out.

'He is asleep,' she said; 'you must not see him at present.'

'All right,' replied Janet; 'but is he better?'

'He is very slightly better.'

Sister Agnes left the room; and Janet, looking after her, snatched up the missionary-box. She trusted to be able to carry it to Clarissa's room without any one seeing her, and the next moment had achieved her object.

'It's awfully dangerous,' said Janet; 'but I have done it. Open it quick—quick, and take out what you want. I hope it isn't wrong to take the money from the poor missionaries.'

'Of course it is not wrong,' said Clarissa, 'for I am only borrowing it. Give me a knife; I'll have to open it just here.'

'But can you glue it down again?'

'Yes; fly for the glue-pot. Get cook to heat it.'

Again Janet rushed through the house. When she returned with the glue Clarissa had removed a whole

sovereign from the missionary-box in shillings, sixpences, and half-crowns.

'Now we must fasten it down,' she said. 'We must trust that no one has noticed that it was removed from father's dressing-room; and you must manage to slip it back after breakfast, Janet.'

'But I shall be off to school then.'

'You must do it first. You know Sister Agnes always comes downstairs for her breakfast; there will be no one in the dressing-room.'

'I'll manage it somehow, Clare. It's awfully dangerous—the whole thing is.'

'It's worth going through for the sake of saving father,' said Clarissa. 'I shall be thankful, more than thankful, if I can carry out this splendid plan.'

'Oh, it will be magnificent of you to save father's life,' said the little girl.

They both went downstairs. Breakfast proceeded. Mrs Rodney was present, and was slightly more hopeful.

'Your father has spent a night of great suffering, but he is rather easier this morning,' she said.

'Can I see him, mother, just for a minute or two?' asked Clarissa.

'No, my dear child, not now; perhaps this evening. Janet dear, you must not see father either this morning; he is dosing, and I do not wish him to be disturbed.—Sister Agnes, do have another egg; you must be so tired after your weary night.'

'Oh, I am nicely rested, thank you, Mrs Rodney,' said Sister Agnes in the tone which always made Janet inclined to stamp her foot.

'She is so like an iceberg,' thought Janet. 'I wish

I could shake her. I quite hate her. I have heard of nice nurses; but she's not one.'

Sister Agnes seemed to read these thoughts as she fixed her cold gray eyes on Janet, and pursed up her mouth in a superior manner.

'Clarissa,' said her mother, 'what was that you told me yesterday about a scholarship? Is it true that you have got the Randall Scholarship?'

'Quite true, mother,' answered Clarissa, turning first red and then pale.

'She's blushing too,' thought little Janet. 'I'll speak to her about it afterwards. I'm not the only one.'

'I am pleased with you,' said Mrs Rodney. 'It will be a help in your education—that is, if'—— she sighed.

'Poor mother,' thought Clarissa, 'she little knows what I mean to do with it. She little, little knows.'

CHAPTER V.

SIR JOHN CARBERY.

WITH the money she had abstracted from the missionary-box Clarissa purchased a ticket, and took the ten o'clock train to London. She had been very lucky; at least she thought so. She was obliged to go in her usual school dress, and her school dress was decidedly shabby; but she did not mind that. She scarcely even regarded the hole in one of her brown cloth gloves; she hoped the eminent doctor would not notice it when she visited him. During the first part of the journey she was in high spirits, for she was stimulated by the success of the preliminary steps of her adventure. She had taken a third-class ticket for her journey. The carriage was empty when she left Upton; but it gradually filled as the train stopped at the various stations. Clarissa's companions seemed to take an interest in her; and one tired, sad-looking lady offered her some sandwiches from a supply which she had for herself. Clarissa accepted one or two, and then the lady entered into conversation.

'Is any one coming to meet you at Paddington?' asked the lady. 'Are you going back to school? But it is not the half-term yet.'

'No, I am not going to school, and there is no one coming to meet me,' answered Clarissa, flushing and feeling very uncomfortable. If only Janet could see her now!

'Can I help you in any way when you get to town?'

At first the girl was inclined to say 'No, thank you,' but she suddenly remembered—what a goose she was not to have thought of it before!—that she had not the slightest idea where Sir John Carbery lived. Perhaps this lady, who certainly looked kind and had a pleasant manner, could tell her.

'I am going,' said Clarissa slowly, 'to see Sir John Carbery.'

'What! the doctor—the great specialist?'

'Yes,' Clarissa replied, nodding her head, and with some difficulty keeping back her tears. 'I want to see him at once; I want to ask him to see my father, who is ill.'

'Poor child,' said the lady. 'My dear,' she continued after a pause, 'my name is Miss Napier, and I happen to know Sir John Carbery. I was ill once, and he did me a great deal of good. I can tell you his address. I am sorry for you; but why are you sent to him?'

'Because father is ill—didn't I say so? I want him to see my father.'

Miss Napier tried not to express any of the curiosity which began to well up in her heart; she saw that Clarissa looked tired and sad. Till now she had not taken much notice of the girl; but, looking her all over, she noted the shabby frock, the worn-out jacket which was much too small for the growing girl, the hole in the brown glove. Then she glanced at Clarissa's face, which, notwithstanding its anxiety, was bright

and wore a charming expression. The girl's face was most intelligent, with its broad brow and clear, well-opened eyes; the complexion was of a soft cream, but the slightest emotion caused the colour to come vividly into the cheeks.

'Quite a lady,' thought Miss Napier; 'but it is strange that this child, for she is no more, should be sent up to town on such an errand.'

Clarissa looked full at the lady while these thoughts were passing through her mind. Clarissa's face seemed to say, 'No, I am not going to confide in you; but I want you to help me.'

'The girl has not even told me her name,' thought Miss Napier. 'I certainly would like to do something for her.'

By-and-by the journey came to an end, and the train ran swiftly into Paddington Station. Clarissa got out, and Miss Napier followed her.

'I will put you in a cab if you will permit me,' said the lady, 'and give the driver the address of my friend's house.'

'Thank you,' answered the girl.

Miss Napier called a cabman from a group standing near, and the next moment Clarissa was in a hansom. She had never been in London before; she felt rather confused as she looked around.

'I wish the town was not quite so busy, and I wish I did not feel so frightened,' thought the girl. 'Oh, of course, I 'll go through it; but I wish I didn't so long for Miss Napier to come with me.'

'Suppose we share this hansom? My house is half-way to the doctor's,' said the lady suddenly. She certainly had the faculty of reading thoughts. The

next moment they had left the station and were speeding along the highroad, past Whiteley's and other interesting places. Miss Napier talked quietly, and soon drew the fact from Clarissa that this was her first visit to London.

'It is rather dangerous for you—is it not?' she remarked; 'I wonder your mother let you come up.'

Clarissa was silent for a moment. Then, looking full at Miss Napier, she said:

'You would like me to tell you everything; but I can't. Please believe that I am not doing wrong. Father is ill, and I am determined to save him.'

'Brave child,' replied Miss Napier. Something like a lump rose in her throat; then, after a pause, she continued: 'You cannot have a kinder friend than Sir John Carbery; and if you think it doubtful that he will do what you wish, please mention my name. Just say you met Jane Napier on your way to town. You need not say more; the words Jane Napier will just be sufficient. He will do anything in his power for you for my sake.'

Miss Napier blushed as she spoke. Soon afterwards the cab drew up at her own house. Here she bade Clarissa a kind good-bye, said something to the cabman, and the girl was borne out of sight. Clarissa was now too excited to feel even nervous; her heart was beating quickly, but her manner was composed when the cab arrived at Sir John Carbery's house in Grosvenor Street. The cabman pulled up short, and the girl dismounted. She fumbled in her pocket for her purse.

'If you please, miss,' said the man, 'I have been paid already; and the lady has given directions that I am

to wait for you, miss. It don't matter how long you stay; it 's all settled, miss.' He smiled at Clarissa, who got first red and then felt angry, and then determined to say nothing more about it.

'Perhaps God meant it. Miss Napier was very kind, and I will send her back the money when I get my scholarship,' thought the girl.

Clarissa rang the bell of the great house; when the servant appeared she asked if she could see Sir John Carbery.

'Will you step in, miss? My master has just seen his last patient. I don't know if he will have time to see any one else.'

Clarissa found herself in a spacious hall magnificently furnished. She was shown into a dining-room, where a cloth was laid for lunch. A moment later the man returned.

'Will you come this way?'

Clarissa followed him down a long, thickly-carpeted passage. He threw open a door which led into an anteroom, walked past Clarissa, opened another door, and announced, 'The young lady, sir.'

'It is funny that he never even asked my name,' thought the girl. She went in, knowing that her face was white, and with a wild feeling in her heart. Suppose Sir John Carbery refused her—suppose he said, 'I cannot possibly go to your father in such an informal way;' but there was no use in thinking of her fears now. She was facing the lion, and had to make the most of her opportunity.

'Sit down—won't you?' said Sir John in a kind tone. Clarissa looked up at him and saw a tall, slender man, with hair rapidly turning gray, keen eyes, and a

firm mouth. He looked intently at her; but the next moment turned away, opened a drawer, took out a paper, pushed in the drawer again, and turned the key in the lock. He was giving his young visitor time to recover from her trepidation.

'Now, what can I do for you?' he asked.

'I ought to tell you that my name is Clarissa Rodney,' began the girl.

'Are you suffering? Have you come to tell me your symptoms?'

'I have not. I have come because—because I am in trouble, and I hope—I just hope—that you—that you will help me.'

'Speak out, my child,' said Sir John. 'First of all, tell me how old you are?'

'Sixteen. I am only a schoolgirl.'

'You look like a schoolgirl,' said Sir John, and he smiled slightly.

That smile reassured Clarissa. Her heart began to beat less rapidly, and she tried to collect her thoughts. 'It is about father,' she said. 'Father is very ill. I do not know what is the matter; but his own doctor says that if there is a man in the wide world who can cure him you are that person.'

'Where does your father live?'

'At Upton.'

'Upton in ——shire?'

'Yes.'

'And his name is ——?'

'His name is Professor Rodney. He is the Professor of Literature at the college for men at Upton.'

Sir John opened a book which lay near and wrote a few words in it.

'And what is your doctor's name?'

'Dr Bennett.'

'If he thinks I can cure your father, why does he not send for me?'

'Because we are very poor. Your fee would be large; Dr Bennett told me so last night. He said that he was most anxious that father should see you; but that father had absolutely made up his mind not to go to the expense.'

'And you have come to plead with me to visit your father for nothing? Is that so?'

'It is not so.' Clarissa stood up; there was a proud light in her eyes although her lips trembled. 'I want you to come and I want to pay you myself. I shall have the money in a month's time. Will you wait for it just for one month, and will you trust me? Will you please trust me although I am only a young girl? Will you come and see father and save his life?'

'You must tell me more about this.'

Sir John got up now, walked to the door, opened it, and called to his servant: 'Tell Lady Carbery not to wait lunch.' Then he came back and sat down in quite a cosy, confidential way opposite Clarissa. 'You can tell me now,' he said. 'Tell me the whole story; take your own time. I am not in any special hurry.'

Clarissa did tell her story; at least she told part of it. She described her father's illness and some of its symptoms, and her mother's despair, and her own agony of mind. Then she told Sir John what Dr Bennett had said to her the night before. 'Father will not send for you because he cannot pay,' said the girl. 'Father is about the proudest man I ever met. Even if you did make him well it would almost kill him if

he knew you had come to visit him except with the full fee, and your fee is'——

Sir John hastily turned over the pages of an ABC time-table which lay near him.

'To Upton,' he said, 'my fee would be thirty-five guineas.'

'That's exactly what Dr Bennett said. Father has not got thirty-five guineas to give.'

'There are some things which pay better than money,' said Sir John. 'There is such a thing as pluck. Sometimes a doctor is paid by the pluck, the courage, the filial affection of those who implore his services. Suppose you pay me in that way, little girl; suppose that signifies thirty-five—nay, more than thirty-five—guineas to me!'

'It cannot be done,' said Clarissa; 'father would inquire. He is a very keen man of business even now, and he would inquire, and he would never forgive me; besides, it is not necessary. I have won a prize at school—a great prize of forty pounds. You can scarcely believe it; but I have, and I am going to pay you out of that. Won't it be splendid? All I ask you to do is this—wait for the money till I give it to you. Perhaps you will have to wait a month.'

'Oh, that would be quite convenient,' said Sir John.

'Thank you; and when will you come to Upton?'

'The sooner the better, if it is a serious case. You see you have practically told me nothing. I can only conjecture that your father's symptoms point to my own speciality, but that is all I know.'

'Dr Bennett will tell you.'

'But Dr Bennett is the doctor who has the charge of

the case. I cannot presume to interfere with him unless he himself asks me to do so.'

Clarissa thought for a moment.

'I 'll manage it,' she said. 'I 'll take the very next train back, and I 'll go to Dr Bennett's house, and he will send for you.'

'The moment he does so I will be sure to come.'

'But I am not going to tell Dr Bennett what I told you,' said Clarissa; 'it would not do.'

'Then how am I to appear?'

'Let me think.'

Sir John interrupted her. 'The stratagem of all this is so magnificent that it arouses my keenest interest,' he said. 'I am to visit a remarkable man, whom I know by reputation, who is very ill; and you, his daughter, are to pay me in a month's time, and he must never know that you are doing this. Is that what I am to understand?'

'Quite so. You have taken it in splendidly,' said Clarissa.

'Then you may leave the matter in my hands with the utmost confidence,' replied Sir John. 'I will visit your father as soon as I hear from Dr Bennett, and I will say that a very special friend of your father's has called on me, and has asked me to visit him, and that this friend is paying me the fee.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Clarissa. 'How good you are!'

'I am glad I am able to help you. There is just one thing more, Miss Rodney; there is no hurry about the fee. I should like to do this service for you for nothing; but that I see would not suit you. Only, pray, let me have the money when it best suits your convenience.'

'I shall have it myself in a month,' said Clarissa confidently, 'and you shall be paid at once. Oh, I can never thank you enough. I feel sure that you will cure my father.'

'The matter is in God's hands, my dear girl,' said the doctor. He rose and conducted Clarissa into the hall.

'How did you come?' he inquired.

'In a hansom; and, oh! such a strange thing happened. I met a lady in the train, a total stranger to me, a Miss Napier, and she said I was to mention her name to you'——

'What! Jane Napier?'

'Yes. She said I was to tell you that she was Jane Napier.'

'One of my oldest friends. When does your train go back?'

'Half-past two. I shall be a little late returning home; but mother won't notice. She doesn't notice anything now, except father and what concerns him. When I told her that I had got the big prize yesterday she scarcely noticed. She only thinks of father.'

'That is quite natural. I hope to see your father early to-morrow. You must get Dr Bennett to send me a wire to-night. For that matter, if it were essential, I could come down by a night train.'

'Oh! you are very good.'

'They are lunching in the dining-room. You must have something before you return to Upton. Come, I insist upon it; if you don't eat I shall have two patients instead of one.'

Sir John opened the door of the dining-room.

'My dear,' he said to a sweet-faced lady with white hair who was seated at the table, 'this is a young

friend of mine, Miss Clarissa Rodney; she knows Jane Napier.—Sit down, Miss Rodney, won't you?—She is in a hurry to catch her train, Susan, and I think a glass of wine and a—yes, a cutlet, would sustain her.'

Lady Carbery was as kind as her husband, and saw to Clarissa's wants. Ten minutes later the girl was bowling back in her hansom to Paddington Station. Never did a girl travel through London with a lighter or more thankful heart.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRIEND WHO PAYS.

DR BENNETT was thoroughly amazed when he saw Clarissa and heard what she had done; but he promised secrecy, and arranged to telegraph for Sir John Carbery.

'I will ask Sir John to come down to-night,' he said. 'I am more convinced than ever that he can put matters straight; and the patient has been in great suffering all day. Oh no, I won't mention your part of the matter. You cannot even tell me the name of the friend?'

'No, I cannot tell you; I can only say that the friend is going to pay, and that Sir John will come.'

'You speak as though you had seen him.'

'How could I have seen him?' said Clarissa, turning aside.

'I won't betray your secret,' said Dr Bennett. 'Now go home; you look quite fagged.'

Clarissa did hurry home. There she poured into the faithful Janet's ears the story of her day's adventure.

'Oh, Janey! I am quite certain Sir John will cure father; and he is so nice, and so kind.'

'Mother's eyes looked quite red when she came down

to dinner to-day,' said little Janet. 'I was home from school, but she didn't notice me a bit. She never asked why I came home. I came because I had a cold. I am sure father is very ill; he has been in great pain.'

'I am certain Sir John will relieve him,' said Clarissa. 'There is Dr Bennett coming up the steps. Oh! he is coming in here. No; I am not going away unless mother tells me to go.'

Dr Bennett came in, nodded to both the girls, and a moment later Mrs Rodney entered the room.

'I have come to give you a piece of good news,' said Dr Bennett. He glanced at Clarissa, who kept her seat.

'If mother tells me to go,' thought Clarissa, 'I will say that if the doctor has important news about father I must hear it.'

Mrs Rodney, however, was past thinking of Clarissa. Her anxious eyes, brimful of all the eager love of her heart, were fixed upon the doctor's face. 'Good news?' she said. 'But you have not seen him since the middle of the day, and his sufferings have been terrible. Oh! Dr Bennett, you must be mistaken.'

'The man who on all God's earth can relieve him, will be here by midnight,' was the doctor's reply.

'What! Sir John Carbery? But you know my husband's wishes. Dr Bennett, I am surprised at you.'

'I have just had information that a friend of your husband's is going to pay the doctor—a friend he will not mind owing this great service to. Under the circumstances, it is your husband's bounden duty to accept the possibility of relief,' was Dr Bennett's

remark. 'Anyhow, my dear lady, the matter is settled, and Sir John arrives at midnight.'

'Well, I am sure, I am relieved,' replied Mrs Rodney. She sank down on the nearest chair, and burst into tears.

'I will go up and see my patient,' said Dr Bennett.

When the doctor left the room Clarissa stole up to her mother. Mrs Rodney was crying just as if her heart would break; the girl put her arms round her mother's neck. 'Let us pray to God, mother,' she whispered.

'Oh! my child, my child,' said Mrs Rodney. 'Oh! Clare, if he is taken from me I shall die too.'

'Mother, I am sure he won't be taken. I am sure God will help us. He has sent Sir John Carbery. Oh! mother'——

'It does seem amazing,' said Mrs Rodney. 'Do you know, I have been praying about it all day. Clare, dear, don't talk to me—don't ask me many questions; but if you like to pray, do so. You are only a child, and do not understand the position. Now I must go back to your father. Stay here and give poor little Janet her tea. Be good children, both of you; and efface yourselves, my loves; that is the kindest thing to do just now.'

CHAPTER VII.

HEARING THE NEWS.

'IT is all right,' Clarissa told Janet. 'I am certain Sir John will be able to cure father. If you had heard him you would be as confident as I am. Mother says we are to efface ourselves. If I had effaced myself to-day where would father be? But it's all right, and I don't mind.'

'Let's have a fire in our bedroom, and sit there,' said Janet. 'Let's sit there all night until we know what Sir John Carbery says of him.'

Clarissa thought over this plan, and finally agreed to it. She and Janet lit the fire in the desolate bedroom, and Janet stole down to the kitchen and coaxed cook to give her a little tempting supper, which they might eat by-and-by.

As they sat by the fire, talking of many things, as eager girls will, Janet said over and over again, 'You are lucky to have got that scholarship. If mother doesn't find out about the money being taken from the missionary-box you'll be the happiest girl that ever lived, Clarissa.'

Clarissa owned that she was almost in that condition that night; and at midnight, when little Janet

was tired out and was sound asleep in bed, the elder girl stole out of the room and leaned over the banisters listening with her heart in her mouth, for she heard the sound of wheels coming down the silent street, and they stopped outside the hall-door. Clarissa flew to the lobby window, pulled aside the blind, and saw Dr Bennett and Sir John Carbery enter the house. There was a short interval of silence, and then she heard footsteps on the stairs and the door of her father's room closed. Then there was profound silence—a silence that might be felt.

Clarissa stood and waited, wishing her heart would not beat as it did, and wishing she could quiet the overwhelming anxiety which troubled her. Presently steps were heard in the sick-room, and Sister Agnes bustled out, looking important and excited. She ran upstairs to fetch something, and passed Clarissa crouching down on the stairs.

'Oh! do go to bed, child,' she said.

'But how is he? Please tell me.'

'Sir John thinks he may get better. He is going to do something to relieve him at once. Don't keep me.'

Sister Agnes's voice sounded kinder than usual, and Clarissa's heart swelled with hope.

In about an hour the doctors went downstairs, but Mrs Rodney remained in the sick-room, with Sister Agnes to help her.

'I'll do it,' thought Clarissa. 'I must—I will know the worst.'

She ran downstairs. There was a light streaming from under the dining-room door. Clarissa pushed the door open and entered; she went straight up to Sir John.

'Please tell me—please tell me—I can bear it,' she said.

The eminent doctor looked full into her eyes, his own eyes dancing with the knowledge of the secret they held between them. 'Your father will get well,' he said.—'Good Heavens! what ails the child?' he continued, for Clarissa, quite overcome, had fallen in a faint on the floor. Dr Bennett lifted her up, put her on a sofa, and gave her a restorative. 'Now you must go straight to bed,' he said. 'There is no time in this house to have two invalids. You must get into bed and go to sleep. I will take you upstairs.' He did so. Clarissa felt ashamed of herself, but was too weak to resist him.

'That 's a fine girl,' said Sir John Carbery when Dr Bennett had returned. 'I have never met any one with more sensibility and more common-sense.'

'Why, do you know her?' asked the doctor. 'I mean have you seen her before?'

'I can tell you nothing except that she is a fine girl. If ever she wants a friend commend her to me. I should not like to let such a girl go out of my life; she would make a splendid nurse herself some day. Well, Bennett, I must hurry now to catch the early train to town. You must go on with the line of treatment I have indicated, and write to me if there is any change. Oh! by the way, the friend who has asked me to come down to-day will not mind how many more visits I pay to Upton. Have no hesitation in sending for me if the symptoms which I was able to relieve to-night occur again. Now I really must be off.'

Clarissa in bed, with tears in her eyes and a weight

removed from her heart, heard the doctors go away in the carriage.

'Oh, thank God!' she said, turning to her little sister. 'I do want always, all my days, to be a good girl, just because He helped me so much now.'

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP.

THE Randall Scholarship was the great aim of every self-respecting girl attending the celebrated day-school at Upton. The pupils numbered between five and six hundred, and the institution was conducted on the most approved modern principles.

The Randall Scholarship was a gift to the school by an eccentric old gentleman quite a hundred and fifty years ago. The school in those days was very little more than a dame-school. Now a company had taken up the institution and conducted it most successfully. The teachers were all capable men and women, well paid for their services; and as the terms were low, girls from the surrounding country flocked to the big school. Clarissa had been a pupil there since she was ten years old, and had worked her way from the lower to the upper school, where she was now in the sixth form. Though clever in a way, and in some things even brilliant, the idea that she might compete successfully for the Randall Scholarship had never occurred to her mind. There were scholarships in the school worth even sixty pounds a year; but the prestige of the Randall Scholarship carried all before it, for the

founder had imposed many conditions with regard to thoroughness of work, the character of the girl who competed, her term work, her influence in the school, &c. Only the most promising pupils could try for this prize, and then only after passing several preliminary examinations.

Step by step Clarissa had qualified herself for the final effort; and when it came to the last her name stood at the head of the list. She was extremely delighted, and the immediate result has already been described. To win so large a sum of money, and to be able immediately to put that money to the use she deemed the highest, almost turned her head. She was determined, however, to guard her secret most carefully. No one must know how she would spend those forty pounds.

The day-school was located in a very noble pile of buildings. There was a splendid hall, and the schoolrooms of various sizes were all fitted on the best and newest principles. The girls whose parents did not live at Upton occupied houses of residence, which were each under the care of a mistress and a staff of teachers. The accommodation in each house was restricted to fifty girls.

Clarissa lived with her parents. Professor Rodney was not only Professor of Literature at the men's college; he also taught at the large public school for boys, as well as at the girls' school. He was a remarkably clever man, and had a wonderful gift for foreign languages. Clarissa had acquired her knowledge of German from her father.

Janet was not yet an inmate of the great school, but was at a preparatory school, and hoped to join the day-school within the year.

On the morning following the consultation with Sir John Carbery, Clarissa went off to school in high spirits. She would have to account for her absence the day before; but she had forgotten all about this until she reached the school and confronted the teacher who had the charge of the roll-call.

'You were absent yesterday, Clarissa,' said Miss Purcell. 'Were you ill? What was the reason?'

'I was not ill,' replied Clarissa.

'Then, why did you not attend?'

'I cannot tell you.'

'You cannot tell me; that is not a polite answer. I must insist on getting a reason for your absence.'

'My father was ill. I cannot tell you more.' Clarissa's face was pale and looked troubled.

Miss Purcell was silent for a moment, then she said, 'I shall have to exact the usual forfeit. I am sorry, of course, that your father was ill; but you ought to have asked permission to absent yourself.'

Clarissa slightly bent her head and took her place in class. The usual work of the school went on, and at eleven o'clock several of the girls went into the large playground, where they paced up and down, each girl with her special friend. A girl who was fond of Clarissa now came up to her.

'It was a great pity you were away yesterday,' she said. 'The Trustees were present, and all the Governors came into the school. You were asked for by every one. Miss Harlington sent for you, and was much annoyed when she heard you were absent; she was very nearly sending to your house to desire you to come over at once.'

'What a blessing she didn't,' thought Clarissa, with

a little gasp at the thought of the danger she had escaped.

'What is the matter with you, Clare? You look queer and excited, yet pleased; you look quite worn-out,' said Mary Lancaster, gazing affectionately at her friend.

'We have had a great deal of trouble at home. Of course you know father has been dangerously ill.'

'How is he now?'

'Better. A great specialist came from London last night and saw him, and gave him relief. Sir John Carbery thinks he will get well. Oh, Mary, if he had died!'

Mary gave her friend's arm a squeeze.

'Does your father know that you have won the scholarship?' she asked.

'I have not seen him for two days; I was not allowed.'

'He will be pleased when you tell him.'

'I sha'n't worry him about it yet.'

'What is it?' cried a merry-voiced girl who came up at that instant. Her name was Agnes Martin. 'Oh, there you are, Clare,' she continued. Aren't all your people delighted? I am proud even to know you. They say you are the youngest girl who has ever gained the Randall. Your name is to be published in the papers, and'——

'Oh, I hope not,' said Clarissa.

'My goodness! aren't you pleased? I should be as proud as Punch. When I told father your name was at the top of the list, he said, "Well, Agnes, if you ever get to such an honourable position I shall give you"'——

'What?' cried Mary. 'You do look excited, Agnes.'

'Why, ten pounds. He said he would give me ten pounds to spend as I liked. I could buy a bicycle. You may be sure I will have a good try for the scholarship next year. The pity of it is that I have not got brains like yours, Clarissa.'

'Oh! I have got no special quality of brains,' replied Clarissa. 'The marks for foreign languages were very high; and of course, as father's daughter'—— She turned aside, her lips quivering. She had a memory of the father she loved helping her evening after evening, putting difficulties straight, smoothing out what puzzled and worried, and helping her to grasp the keynote of each language.

'Well,' said Mary, 'it is all right; you are a genius, and you have succeeded. You'll be able to take every class you like now in the school, for your education is to be completely paid for.'

'What do you mean?'

'Have you not read the new rule? You must have. The money used to be given to the girls—it was last time; but that is all changed. The money is now spent by the Governors on education, and the gainer of the scholarship does not touch a penny of it. Well, it's all the same of course; she gets the benefit, and the kudos, and all the rest.—Why, how white you are; what is the matter?'

'I—I don't understand,' said poor Clarissa.

'How stupid of you; the whole thing is explained in the regulations. The Trustees had the power to alter the old rules; and as they disapproved of the use made of the money by the last holder, who spent it in some unworthy way—I forget how: travelling in

Italy, I think—the value of the scholarship is now expended by the Governors only on the education of the holder. Dear me, I didn't know you cared for money so much for itself.'

'Nor do I. Don't talk to me for a minute or two. I have a headache. I am more tired than I had any idea of.'

She leaned up against the wall. Just then the great bell rang and the girls returned to class. In spite of every effort, Clarissa was absent-minded during that afternoon. The work in itself was specially interesting and quite to her taste. She was a keen student of literature, and was now studying the magnificent literature of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; but not even Shakespeare's noblest utterances had power to take her attention off the agonising thought which ever whispered in her perplexed brain: 'You promised Sir John Carbery what you cannot give him.'

'But I must keep my word,' thought poor Clarissa; 'whatever happens I must—I will. He trusted me, and I cannot fail him. I must go to the Governors and explain.'

Then it occurred to her that perhaps, after all, her friend had made a mistake. Why should she know more about the scholarship than Clarissa herself? The rules had been given to each girl who competed, and Clarissa with the others had been supposed to read them. As a matter of fact, she had been so eager getting up her different subjects that she had scarcely glanced at them. She knew that the value of the scholarship was forty pounds a year for three years, and remembered also that when a girl much older than herself had won the coveted prize, the

amount was paid to her in cash on a certain day once every year. She had not observed that the rules had been changed, and that the scholarship was no longer to be paid in cash. Clarissa had worked hard—very hard—to win the prize.

How proud she had been when her triumph was announced! She had held her head high, and looked around her with sparkling eyes.

In her elation she had not even time to notice that what was such joy and delight to her was the bitterness of death to others. There was one girl in particular whose face had turned very white—she had leant up against the nearest wall and the next moment left the room. Her name was Martha Moore. She was a girl of about Clarissa's age, and had struggled as hard if not harder than Clarissa herself for the scholarship. She came back after a moment and congratulated her friend—doing it right heartily.

Clarissa did not notice this at the time, but she remembered it now, and a sense of strong discomfort came over her as she recalled the expression of Martha's white face in the moment of her own great victory. Martha had certainly worked for this prize with feverish intensity. She had stayed in school during play hours, had worked late at night, had thought of nothing but the scholarship; nevertheless, she had lost and Clarissa had won.

'After all, no one wanted it as I did,' thought the girl; 'but for it I might now be fatherless. Oh, what will become of me if what Agnes says is correct?'

Clarissa determined to set her mind at rest at once. Accordingly, immediately after school, she went round to the side-entrance and rang the bell of the head-

mistress's private door. Very few girls ever called to see Miss Harlington except by appointment; and Clarissa knew it was a daring thing to go to see her uninvited. 'But whatever happens I must know the worst,' she thought.

The servant who opened the door said that Miss Harlington was at tea; but if Miss Rodney liked to wait she would see her in a few minutes.

Clarissa was shown into a room at one side of the hall. This room contained little furniture except well-filled bookshelves. At another time the girl would have pounced upon a book and lost herself immediately in its contents; but now she was too restless to read. In about a quarter of an hour the servant came back to inform Clarissa that Miss Harlington would see her. She was conducted into a large, cheerful room.

'Well, Miss Rodney,' said the head-mistress, 'take a chair, won't you? I shall finish this note very soon.'

Miss Harlington was seated at her writing-table. She was a tall woman with a fine face and commanding presence. Her hair, which was dark mixed with gray, was worn over a pillow; she had a long face, very keen eyes, and a shrewd mouth; her manner could be both kind and also very cold. She did not particularly wish to see Clarissa at that moment, yet she was proud of her pupil—the girl who had won the Randall Scholarship.

'Now, my dear,' said Miss Harlington, as she dismissed the servant with the note she had just written, 'what have you to say? By the way, I am sorry your father is ill. Miss Purcell reported to me that you were absent yesterday on account of his illness.

She was annoyed at your neglecting the rule, however, to send notice of your absence. Perhaps you have come to apologise; if so, you are forgiven. I trust Mr Rodney is better to-day.'

'Father is better, thank you,' replied Clarissa; 'we have a little'—her lips quivered—'hope to-day.'

'Indeed,' said Miss Harlington. She looked up, and the kindly expression grew in her eyes.

'Come near the fire, dear,' she said; 'it is cold. Please explain to me what you mean by saying you have hope to-day. I did not know your father's illness was dangerous.'

'Father has been dangerously ill,' replied Clarissa, speaking slowly. 'Yesterday he saw a specialist, who gives hope; the specialist thinks he can cure him. He would not have been cured if he had not seen this great doctor.'

'What a mercy he did see him! How thankful we ought to be for our great physicians,' said Miss Harlington. 'But now, my dear, what is your special business? If you came to apologise for your want of thought yesterday, it was nice of you to think of doing so, and just what I should expect of a girl who has distinguished herself as you have done.'

'But I didn't come to apologise,' said Clarissa bluntly.

'Oh, indeed.' The kindly, stimulating light went out of Miss Harlington's eyes. 'What did you come for?' she asked.

'To ask you a question with regard to the Randall Scholarship.'

'You have won the scholarship; that is the main thing. It is forty pounds a year, and the arrangement is that the money is to be devoted altogether to your

education; the Trustees will pay for any extra classes you may care to join—that is, they will pay up to forty pounds, which practically means that your education will be free at this school.'

'But I want—I mean that I hoped—that the money would be paid to me. I don't want to spend it on classes; I wanted the money for itself.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean this: I understood when I won the scholarship that I should receive forty pounds.'

'You receive the worth of forty pounds.'

'But that is not at all the same thing to me. I needed the money.'

'You thought you would be paid by cheque, for instance?'

'Well, a cheque, or in gold or notes; it doesn't matter how.'

'It was very silly of you not to look at the rules; the conditions are clearly stated in them. Here is a copy; you may look it over now.'

'Thank you; you are quite sure?'

'Quite, quite sure. It was silly of you not to read the rules.'

'I am afraid it was very silly.'

Miss Harlington looked long at Clarissa. Clarissa's eyes were downcast, and her face was very white. The idea occurred to the head-mistress just for a moment to draw the girl out. She was not a vain girl, nor a silly one; she could not want the money for any unworthy purpose. That she did want it, and for itself, and very urgently too, was quite evident. Miss Harlington would have inquired further, and this story need never have been written but for an interruption

—the servant entered to say that a great professor had called, and wished to see Miss Harlington. She forgot all about poor Clarissa in this fresh interest.

'My dear,' said the head-mistress, 'I think I have explained. Your lessons during the remainder of your stay at school will be delightful. The best teachers will instruct you; and the honour of having gained the Randall Scholarship is always yours, remember.'

'Then it is quite hopeless?' said Clarissa.

'What do you mean?'

'I cannot have the money?'

'Certainly not. Please don't be stupid. Take these rules with you. Good-bye.'

CHAPTER IX.

FREEMAN'S COTTAGES.

MARTHA MOORE was on her way from school to her humble home; Clarissa was also hurrying home with a feeling at her heart of dismay which she could neither overcome nor get rid of. Martha Moore was a tall and very thin girl of about sixteen years of age; but she looked older, for her pale face was careworn, and a look of anxiety was never absent from her eyes. She was very plainly dressed. Her short serge skirt, a little draggled and untidy, was longer behind than in front, and as she walked along the muddy road it now and then touched the ground and made the backs of her boots wet and uncomfortable; her coat was old-fashioned, and had sleeves a great deal too large; and she wore a plain round felt hat, which, being pushed far back, revealed the great breadth of her forehead and the sweep of her thick eyebrows. Plodding on, swinging one arm in a somewhat awkward manner, Martha soon left the town behind her, and was now in a somewhat lonely part of the country. Loneliness, however, had no terrors for her; she only quickened her steps, and presently turning aside from the highroad, passed through a

turnstile, and went down a narrow lane. This lane led downhill, and as the road was in a shocking condition, Martha held up her flopping skirts. She was cold, and the expression in her gray eyes was almost that of a hunted creature. Presently she reached a row of about half-a-dozen very small and humble-looking houses, known as Freeman's Cottages. Each house had a tiny rustic gate in front, and a narrow pathway ran up to the little porch between flower-beds; but there was not a flower in blossom now—winter had cast its numbing influence over the earth. Passing through the porch, the girl entered a small kitchen.

'Here I am, mother. I am later than usual. I'll come downstairs in a minute or two when I have changed my dress,' she called out as she ran up the very narrow stairs to a room under the roof. Here she quickly got into an old summer dress much too small, brushed back her somewhat scanty brown hair from her forehead, washed her face and hands, and then joined her mother in the little sitting-room.

'Well, how are you?' she asked with a sort of quick eagerness. The woman addressed was seated by the fire; she was in a sort of rocking-chair, and a glance showed that she was lame.

'Have you done it?' said Martha. 'Has she gone?'

'She won't go; she is crying in the kitchen. I wish you would go and speak to her, Patty. She says she will stay without any wages. She does not want to leave me. You must speak to her.'

'Of course I must; it's very ridiculous of her to

go on like that. I can easily manage; it only means getting up an hour earlier in the morning, and sitting up a little later at night. I can leave everything in readiness for you. She must go.'

'Are you quite, quite certain? Just sit down for a moment,' said Mrs Moore.

Martha sat down on the nearest chair.

'Oh, mother, must we discuss it again?' she asked.

'This place is so lonely, I sometimes feel quite nervous when I am by myself for so many hours. I have been wondering if it is worth it all.'

'Worth it all?' repeated Martha. 'I mean to get that scholarship next year. Nothing will deter me. If we keep Annie I cannot continue at the school. She must go. I have money in hand to pay her wages, and she had better go to-night.'

'Very well, darling; very well. I am very sorry that I said anything to annoy you, Patty.'

'Oh, it is nothing, mother.'

Martha rose. A curious change came over her face. She went up to her mother, and bent down and kissed her.

'I am sorry I am cross,' she said. 'It will only last for a couple of days, then I shall be quite cheery and my old self again. Forgive me, mother. I am trying to get through a labyrinth, and sometimes I am puzzled.'

'My poor, brave, darling child,' said Mrs Moore.

Martha went into the kitchen.

'Are you there, Annie?' she said.

'Yes, miss,' said a voice; and a girl with red cheeks and a freckled face, who had been seated in the chimney-corner with her apron flung over her head,

now rose, revealing eyes nearly swollen out of all recognition with crying.

'You can't mean that I am to go, Miss Martha?' she said. 'You can't mean that I am to leave the missus, and her lame and not able to do a thing for herself?'

'Yes; I do mean it.'

'But you can't be so cruel, miss? You are away at school all day, and the missus has no one in the house. I am willing to stay without wages—I am indeed, miss. I don't mind if I don't get anything for six months or a year. My bits of duds will last, and I don't mind—I don't really, miss.'

'Listen, Annie,' said Martha. She went up to the girl and put her hand on her arm. 'Please understand,' she said, 'that this hurts me quite as much as it does you; but it is a pain that we must both go through. You must go—because we must economise, and there is no other way—if I am to continue at school; and I must continue there until my education is finished. Now, I didn't think I could speak to you so plainly; but I have done so.'

An awed expression came over Annie's face; a confidence from Miss Martha was indeed something to be proud of.

'Very well, miss,' she said in a humble tone; 'and 'tain't that you 're loving your mother less, miss?'

'Loving her less?' said Martha. 'I never loved so much. Now, pack up your things. Here 's a shilling for you over and above your wages.'

'Oh, I wouldn't touch it, miss; and I don't want the wages. Must I go to-night, miss?'

'Yes; you have only a short distance to go; and I

would rather begin at once. First, show me how you manage the range. I was never very good at ranges; but I must understand now. Do I pull out this damper when I want to heat the oven, and this when I wish to heat the water in the bath?'

'Oh no, miss; you are quite wrong. This is the damper for the bath, and this for the oven.'

Annie quite recovered herself as she exhibited her superior skill. Soon the two girls were chatting happily, and Annie even laughed once or twice.

'You're almost the best girl I ever met,' said Martha; 'and I shall give you an excellent character when any one comes to ask about you.'

'Thank you, miss; but who wouldn't be good with a lady like your mother, and with you too, Miss Martha?'

'Don't praise me,' said Martha. 'I am often what I ought not to be, and I feel—oh, Annie, I feel—so savage just now.'

'Do you indeed, miss? Why, then, I feel just the same.'

'Shake hands,' said Martha suddenly. Annie stretched out her rough, toil-worn hand; she clasped Martha's, which was very slim and very white.

'Oh!' she said with a sudden fit of compunction, and the tears filling her eyes, 'you'll spoil your beautiful hands. You will, if you go blacking the grate, and pottering in the oven, and cleaning the saucepans. You must wear gloves. Promise me as you'll wear gloves.'

'I have a couple of old pairs, and I will take your advice. I don't want to have my hands spoilt,' said Martha.

Annie laughed when Martha said this. 'Until I do get a place, may I come over to see the missus once a day or so?' she queried.

'I would rather you didn't.'

'That do seem cruel, Miss Martha,' replied the girl.

'Well, come twice a week; but you will get a place soon—you cannot afford to be idle. Now, pack up. You can come in and say good-bye to mother to-morrow, if you like.'

'Oh, that 's much better, Miss Martha. God bless you,' said Annie, and then scrambled upstairs to her loft of a bedroom. She soon came down, dragging her small wooden box after her.

'You can leave the box here till to-morrow,' said Martha.

'Thank you kindly, miss. Me and my brother will fetch it in the course of the morning, when I come to say good-bye to the missus.'

'That is all right. Now go.'

Annie went lingeringly as far as the door. She turned and looked at Martha. 'Mayn't I kiss your white 'and?' she said.

Martha smiled and held out her hand. 'I am not worth it, Annie,' she said. 'I am a failure.'

'You 'll be a big success yet; mark my words,' said Annie.

The little maid-of-all-work went out into the night. There she gave her small, stout person a vigorous shake.

'I 'ates the girl as took the scholarship from our Miss Moore,' was her mental soliloquy. Then she ran across the common in the direction of a row of workmen's small cottages about half a mile away.

Meanwhile Martha looked round the little cottage with a bewildered expression.

'I don't understand the stove, and I know nothing about cooking, and mother cannot do anything for herself; but I'll manage,' she thought. Then she pounced upon a worn copy of Mrs Beeton's cookery-book, which stood on a shelf near the kitchen-range. 'I will study this when mother is in bed,' she thought. She went into the little parlour, and said: 'Mother dear, I have managed about Annie; she has gone.'

'What?' said Mrs Moore; 'gone, and never said good-bye to me!'

'She will come to-morrow to do that. Poor girl! she is very affectionate, and very well meaning. Now then, I have a proposal to make.'

'What is that, my darling?'

'That you and I, just for the present, until we can afford to keep a little servant again, make the kitchen our sitting-room.'

'Oh, Patty, your poor father, if he were alive'——

Patty stamped her foot with impatience. 'Whatever father thought when he was alive, he must have changed his opinions now,' she said. 'The one thing that must seem all-important to him now is that we should live honourably, and be clear of debt, and that I should by some means or other go on with my education. You will be much warmer in the kitchen; you can have your chair in such a position that you can open the oven door—I will arrange it so. You can see that the fire does not go out, and we shall save both fuel and light. Come, I am going to move you in now; we can have supper in the kitchen. I

will take the rug from this room and put it in front of the stove. You don't know how much you will enjoy it.'

'You are a wonderful girl,' said Mrs Moore.

Martha, though wiry, was slender; so she assisted her mother, with some difficulty, into the little kitchen. This apartment was really much more cheerful than the parlour, and Mrs Moore smiled and looked quite pleased as Martha moved about.

'I must get supper,' said the girl, 'and you must teach me. I remember my father saying before he died that you were an excellent cook in your time. Now, what will you have?'

'What shall I have for supper? Well, what is there?'

'I don't know. I'll have a look round,' said Martha, going to the cupboard and surveying the contents critically. 'These provisions have got to last as long as possible,' thought the girl; 'but there is not much.'

This certainly was true. A number of potatoes on the floor, with a few turnips and onions, constituted the store of vegetables. The groceries were at a decidedly low ebb: there was but a handful of tea in the caddy, and the coffee canister was empty; but there was a little sugar, a few raisins, and also a little flour. There was a loaf of fresh bread, which looked quite inviting, a pat of butter, a small piece of bacon, and also half-a-dozen fresh eggs.

'Come,' said Martha, 'we'll have a good meal to commemorate the new régime. Now, mother, you will have to teach me. I am going to give you bread and butter, a fresh egg, and a rasher of bacon for your supper.'

'I have not had such a meal for months and months,' said Mrs Moore.

'You are going to have it to-night. How would you like your egg? Boiled or poached?'

'Oh, boiled, my darling—boiled. You won't be able to manage a poached egg for some time, and it would be a sad pity to waste these. Our neighbour, Mrs Martin, brought them in to-day as a present; she said she thought that you looked very peaky, and she wanted you to eat them all.'

'That I won't,' murmured the girl under her breath. 'Well, mother, it is quite easy to boil the egg—is it not? Oh dear, I do wonder where Annie keeps the saucepans?'

The saucepans, by no means too clean, were found in a tiny scullery just outside the kitchen. Martha, under her mother's directions, prepared the meal. The kettle boiled, the one egg—nothing would induce Martha to boil two—was soon cooked to a turn. Martha cut a rasher off the bacon, and proceeded to toast it in front of the fire.

'I will not touch my egg nor my bacon, although I confess I am very hungry,' said Mrs Moore, 'unless you also have a similar meal.'

'I'll have a rasher of bacon, mother; as to eggs, I don't like them,' said Martha, blushing as she uttered the untruth. She adored eggs, and would like any form of nourishment in her present half-starved condition.

The simple meal was soon ready, and mother and daughter sat down. Martha washed up the tea-things afterwards, and put everything tidily away.

'Now,' she said, 'when will you be ready for bed?'

'Oh, not yet. These long nights weary me so.'

'I have been thinking over everything,' said Martha. 'We must do without a servant—that's plain. It will be no trial after the first day or two. It will rather be very much to our advantage. We shall feel that our little money is all our own; but there will be certain difficulties to overcome. The winter promises to be a cold one; coals will not be cheap, and we don't want fires in too many rooms. Nor is that all. It was difficult for Annie and me between us to get you upstairs at night and downstairs again in the morning. Now I propose that you make the little parlour your bedroom. I will put a chair-bed there. You know the door opens into the kitchen, and the warmth from the stove will get in and make the room quite comfortable. What do you say?'

'I never thought that I should live to see the day when I should want even a parlour,' said Mrs Moore, tears coming for a moment to her eyes.

'But you will never live to see the day when we are in debt, when we are absolutely in money difficulties. Oh, mother darling, that would be a much worse day.'

'So it would. Yes, Martha, I will go there,' said the mother.

'That is right. You really are a splendid mother. Some mothers would be a drag; but you are never a drag.'

'Oh, my poor darling, and I quite lame and utterly helpless.'

'Never mind. When I get the scholarship, which I shall get next year, I will take you to London, and you shall get the best advice. Now, stay where you are. I am going to bring down your bed at once.'

The next half-hour saw the active young mistress of the house very busy. By the end of that time Mrs Moore's bed was placed in a comfortable position in the little parlour; and, tired and excited, but pleased, she was glad to retire to it.

'I will shut the kitchen door until I go up to bed,' said Martha finally. 'I have a few things to do first. Good-night, mother: sleep well. We have done the wisest thing: we have resolved to deny ourselves and also to go straight forward.'

'You are a very brave girl,' said Mrs Moore. 'I was so certain you would be crushed for evermore, for this scholarship meant so much to you.'

'I would have been crushed if you had opposed me,' answered the girl. 'Now, sleep well.'

CHAPTER X.

A CONFIDENCE.

MARTHA was up betimes in the morning to tidy the house. She had to acknowledge to herself that she had but scant knowledge of housework and still less aptitude; she did her work clumsily and—it must be owned—not half so well as the little maid Annie. Nevertheless, Martha managed to get her mother's breakfast, to dress her, and assist her into the kitchen. Then, after laying some coals handy, seeing that Mrs Moore's chair was so placed that she could reach the oven to open it and take out her dinner, which was already placed there, that she had water and food at hand, Martha, promising to be back as soon as possible, left for school, rather more untidy than usual.

Martha Moore was never noticeable for the excellence or becomingness of her dress. She did not know now, as she walked along the country lanes, that there was a smudge across her cheek, that her dark gray eyes had a weary expression, and that her collar bore evidence of having been worn yesterday. She was thinking out several problems.

Martha's way to the Drummond Day-school led past

the Rodneys' house; she looked up at it as she went past, and a great bitterness burned in her heart. It was a large, solid-looking house. 'Why should Clarissa Rodney have got the scholarship? I am convinced I answered every question just as well as she did,' thought the girl. 'Well, never mind, I hate myself for feeling envy and spite; I didn't know it was in me. I was born to work hard. If it wasn't for mother's lameness I think I could bear anything.'

Just then the hall door of the big house opened, and Clarissa, in her very neat costume, came out, saw Martha, and ran down the steps to greet her.

'If you are going to school, we may as well walk there together,' said Clarissa.

Martha made a valiant effort to check the feeling of jealousy at her heart. 'Yes,' she replied, colouring.

Clarissa looked at her. 'Perhaps you would rather not walk with me?' she queried. 'I shall quite understand if you don't.'

'Why should I not walk with you?'

'Oh, because I have won what—what you wanted.'

'I did want it very badly,' said Martha; 'there is no use pretending I did not. I wanted it, and I hoped I should get it.'

'I wish with all my heart you had,' said Clarissa. 'It's of no possible use to me.'

Martha gave her a wistful glance up and down, noticing the neatly-made dress, the perfectly-fitting coat, the gloves, the nicely-arranged hair. Of course, Clarissa was thinking of the money-value of the scholarship. Martha was also thinking of the money-value.

'I can understand that,' said Martha; 'but you cannot help being rich.'

'Rich?' said Clare. 'What do you mean?'

'You are rich; you must be. You live in that great house.'

'Oh!' said Clare with a laugh. 'Is that all?'

'We live in one of the tiny Freeman's Cottages, in perhaps the most unhealthy part of Upton,' said Martha; 'but never mind, I don't want to speak of myself. Only, if you did not want the scholarship because you are so rich, I wish you had never entered for it.'

'But we are not rich. At this present moment I am in the utmost difficulty about money,' Clarissa replied, looking Martha all over. 'Tell me frankly, do you out and out hate me?'

'There are times when I do,' replied Martha; 'but not when I am with you.'

'Then that is honest, and I thank you for being so frank.'

'I should not hate you at all—because I know you are cleverer than I am, and I always respect talent—if it were not for mother,' said Martha.

'Your mother? Ah! I should never have cared for the scholarship had it not been for my father. At any rate, I should never have won it but for him.'

'Oh, I know of Professor Rodney,' said Martha in a tone of awe. 'He is a great linguist, and his wonderful knowledge of literature quite dazzles me. No wonder you wrote such a splendid theme; and all your answers were so convincing, and your papers on German and French grammar were almost without a flaw. I am not jealous of you—I am never jealous of you—when I am with you.'

Clarissa looked at her eagerly. 'Listen!' she said. 'I wish you had the scholarship.'

'There is no good wishing,' Martha replied; but the colour flooded her pale cheeks.

'Oh! I wish with all my heart you had it. It is of no use to me. I did something. I must confide in you. I know you won't tell.'

'Of course I won't,' Martha exclaimed, feeling intensely flattered at this confidence.

'I have always liked you in the distance,' continued Clarissa; 'but we have not been real friends because—— Oh! I don't know why; but we have not. Only, let us be real friends in the future. You think I am the happiest girl in the world, because I have got what you longed for; in reality I am so absolutely miserable that I must tell some one or I shall be ill.'

'I will never, never tell unless you give me leave,' Martha repeated.

'I am certain you are honourable. I see it in your face.'

'I think I am,' Martha said quietly with a proud note in her voice.

Clarissa took out a small gun-metal watch which her father had given her on her last birthday. 'We have five minutes before we need go to school,' she said. 'We can go round by Ripton Square. We won't meet any of the other girls. May I put my hand through your arm?'

'Do,' replied Martha, and she felt her heart beat faster. It was very kind of Clarissa. Martha felt low down just then; but in her heart of hearts she knew that in every sense of the word she was Clarissa's equal.

Clarissa's next words seemed to point to this fact. 'Being poor is nothing; it's character that tells. I know you have got character, and I know you have got intellect. Why, you have a splendid forehead; it is so broad, and your eyes have so much expression in them. You will do wonders in the future. There is one special thing about you, too, which I like tremendously.'

These delicious words were like balm to Martha's sore heart. 'What is the one thing?' she inquired; and her eyes were very soft as she glanced at Clarissa Rodney.

'You know how to deny yourself.'

'I have always been denying myself,' Martha murmured. 'If I hadn't learnt that poor lesson I shouldn't be good for much. I am just sixteen. I have never had a life of luxury, never since father died.'

'How old were you then?'

'He died when I was between nine and ten years old. In his lifetime we had a good house and a couple of servants; since then we have had a small house and no servant to speak of.'

'I must come and see you some day. You interest me more and more each moment you speak.'

'You had better not come; our house is too poor.'

'I love cottages.'

'Oh, it's worse than a cottage; and we don't keep any servant now.'

'No servant!' exclaimed Clarissa. 'You are at school all day! How do you manage?'

'I can answer that question in about a fortnight. At present I have not even begun to manage. We

parted with the servant last night; I have done the work myself this morning.'

'Martha, do you mind?' asked Clarissa very gently; 'there is a great smudge across your cheek. May I wipe it off?'

'Oh! thank you,' answered Martha. 'I suppose I got it when I was blacking the stove.'

'Did you say that your mother would have to remain all day alone in one of Freeman's Cottages? Did you mean that when you told me you had sent the servant away?'

'Yes; that is what I meant. There, Clarissa, it is past talking about. If you have anything to tell me, you must do so at once, for the school-bell will ring in a few minutes.'

'Oh dear!' cried Clarissa, 'I wish you could help me. You don't know what a terrible scrape I have got into.'

'You may trust me,' said Martha. 'I trusted you when I told you about mother and the servant.'

'Then that settles it,' Clarissa decided. 'You shall hear everything. Nobody else knows except my darling little sister Janet. This morning when I was dressing I told Janey that I must talk things over with a girl about my own age; and, when I prayed this morning, I asked God to give me a friend to confide in. Then the moment I opened the hall-door there you were passing by, and I knew at once that you were the very girl. Had I not met you I should have told Mary Lancaster, who is my special companion; but I know you are better qualified, for you have suffered, and you still suffer, yourself.'

'You had better be quick in telling me,' Martha said with a smile.

'Well, this is what has happened. Father — my darling, my dearest father—was at the point of death. The doctor said that only one thing could cure him—he must see a great specialist from London; but father would not hear of it because he had not sufficient money to pay him. "I cannot pay him without defrauding others," said father; "so that settles the matter." Our doctor, Dr Bennett, told me all that, Martha; and when I questioned him further he stated that Sir John Carbery, the great specialist, would charge a fee of thirty-five guineas.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Martha with a gasp.

'Nearly the whole of my scholarship—you understand?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I made up my mind to get the doctor to see father, and I went to London myself the day before yesterday, and saw him. Oh! he was so kind, and I arranged everything with him. I told him he must never, never tell who had really paid him, and I asked him to wait for his money for a month. He came, Martha, and saw father, and put right all that was wrong; and now my darling, darling father is recovering, and we shall not lose him. But, listen! oh, listen! I cannot pay the doctor, for the rules with regard to the scholarship are changed, and the successful candidate does not get the forty pounds at all—she receives the worth of the money in payment of the expense of her education. That is according to the rules, of course —but somehow I was so eager competing that I did not trouble to read them; and as I knew that Agnes

Hart, the last girl who gained the scholarship, had the money to spend, I expected the same, so this news comes upon me now as a stunning blow. What am I to do? I feel almost mad. Oh! Martha, don't you pity me?'

Before replying to this query Martha fixed her big gray eyes on Clarissa's face, and gave her hand a squeeze. Then she answered: 'I have never heard a story exactly like yours before, and I cannot tell you yet whether I pity you or not. To-morrow morning I will speak to you about this.'

'Why not after school to-day?' asked Clarissa.

'I must hurry back home; I shall not have an instant—not an instant—to speak to anybody; but I will come early to-morrow morning, and we can meet as we met to-day, and then I will tell you what I really think.'

'How slowly and wisely you speak,' Clarissa remarked; 'but it is hard to wait for good advice for twenty-four hours.'

'I don't suppose I shall be able to give you any advice; but I shall be able to tell you what I think. Now, there is the bell. We must hurry.'

The girls entered through the wide school-gates; they joined a procession of girls all going to their respective class-rooms. Clarissa and Martha parted at the main entrance. Martha's face wore a queer, half-wistful, half-triumphant smile which puzzled Clarissa not a little.

'Yet I am glad that I told her,' was Clarissa's thought.

CHAPTER XI.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

BEFORE leaving for school, Martha had made her mother thoroughly comfortable for the day; so Mrs Moore settled down in her rocking-chair and looked around her. She was a woman of not quite forty years of age. In youth she must have been pretty; she had still the remains of good looks on her worn, very pale face. Eight years before this story opens she had met with a bad accident—had hurt her hip, and since then had scarcely been able to walk. The necessary confinement and want of exercise had reduced the sparkling, bright-eyed, rosy-faced woman into a pale, shadowy creature. But Martha thought her mother was beautiful still; her mother's face suited her as no other face ever could. The two were companions in the best sense of the word—they never quarrelled, they never disputed; but Martha took the lead. Had Mrs Moore been told when her husband died that by the time her daughter was sixteen she would be completely ruled by the vigorous, intelligent girl she would have laughed and said, 'When that day comes to pass I shall not know myself.' But the day

had arrived, and Mrs Moore knew now that she was under Martha's thumb.

'Not that I mind,' she said to herself; 'the girl has the wisdom of twenty ordinary girls. It is not every girl who would deny herself every scrap of pleasure and comfort and take the entire care of this little house on her shoulders, and do all her studies as well. It is true it is a bit lonely for me. I miss little Annie; she was commonplace, but she was good and faithful; she brought me the gossip of the neighbours, and did her work well. Dear! dear! I see dust in that distant corner. There will be more dust there to-morrow, and more the next day and the next, and soon the one recommendation the poor little place possesses will have vanished. It is impossible for Martha to keep everything clean. In the first place, she has not the time; in the second place, she has not the wit. It is plain to any one who studies the order of creation that the Lord does not give the same wits to everybody; He keeps several sets of wits, and deals them out according to the characters He is putting into the world. Now, Martha has got intellect and a grand mind. She can work and study and think and acquire; she is her father's daughter out and out. It is splendid to see her when she is taking up a new line of thought, to observe the kindling light in her eyes and the flush on her cheeks and the expression of her mouth; but give her a room to dust and the result is quite awful. Now that we have no help she will have all the dusting—she who has got no wit for it—and all the cleaning, and all the cooking; for I am nothing better than a log. Well, after all, she is a brave child, and would rather face discomfort than debt. She says

that, with our small means, now that she has lost that scholarship—although how she lost it beats me—we cannot manage if we keep Annie, so poor Annie is away. I wish some neighbour would lend me a lot of old novels—anything to pass the time.'

Mrs Moore looked round her kitchen, and watched the hands of the eight-day clock travelling slowly on their accustomed day's round. The hands of the old clock did their duty valiantly; they never paused nor faltered nor hesitated; but how slow they were, and how weary and discontented Mrs Moore became! It was all very well for Martha, who was working hard at school, and had the keen interest of making up for her deficiencies of this year, and of knowing that she would win the Randall Scholarship next term; but for the mother, with nothing to do and no bright Annie to chat to, the time did go very slowly indeed.

'I wonder I submit to it,' she muttered inaudibly.

Just then there came a tap at the back door, and a neighbour, Mrs Martin, who had brought her the eggs the day before, opened it, looked in, and said, 'Where's that Annie of yours? I have been ringing at the front door for the last three or four minutes. I think the bell is broken, for I could not hear a sound. How are you, Mrs Moore? My goodness! what are you sitting in the kitchen for?'

'Come in, please, Mrs Martin,' said Mrs Moore. Mrs Martin was the most gossipy of the neighbours; she was the sort of woman the more thrifty people in this row of small cottages rather avoided, for she wasted their time and retailed little items of intelligence from house to house, and thus did no end of mischief. But Mrs Moore in her present weary condition was very

glad to see her. 'Come in and sit for a moment, will you? Martha is at school as usual and—Annie has gone.'

'Annie gone!' exclaimed Mrs Martin, pricking up her ears at this intelligence. 'Why, I thought she was that devoted'——

'It wasn't her fault, poor child. I haven't thanked you yet for the eggs, Mrs Martin; they are very nice.'

'You 're welcome to 'em,' replied Mrs Martin, 'and I have brought you a couple of apples. I thought you might fancy a baked apple.' As she spoke she laid three or four large rosy-cheeked apples on the little kitchen table. 'Dear! dear! and are you all alone? Have you got another servant? I had better come and stay with you and help you to tidy up a bit.'

'Oh! we are quite tidy,' answered Mrs Moore. 'Martha saw to that.'

Mrs Martin had a hawk's eyes for dust. Poor Mrs Moore quite trembled. 'I do hope she won't look under the table in the corner,' she thought. 'Patty will be disgraced for evermore if Mrs Martin sees the way she swept the floor this morning.'

Mrs Martin did not notice the dust. 'I tell you what,' she remarked. 'The Higginses, just over the hill, have got a girl they want trained. I don't doubt they would let her come to you for five or six pounds a year; only you would have to do the training. However, with nothing to occupy you but just sitting in your chair, you might be able to manage that. I am very busy to-day; but I'll find time to go round to the Higginses and tell them to send Jane over for you to interview.'

'No, thank you,' answered Mrs Moore. 'Annie

would have stayed if we could have kept her. The fact is, we cannot afford it.'

Mrs Martin's eyes lit up with a curious mingling of sorrow for the neighbour and satisfaction at the interesting piece of news she would have to retail to all the other neighbours.

'Have you lost any of your money?' she asked. 'Dear, dear, and you were never too flush. I am sorry.'

'No, we have not lost any. We are just as well off as we ever were, or just as badly off I should say; but Patty hoped to have got a valuable scholarship at the school, and she was disappointed.'

'Oh! my daughter goes to the day-school too,' said Mrs Martin. 'It is said that Miss Clarissa Rodney, quite a rich girl, got the scholarship.'

'Yes; she is the daughter of Professor Rodney. Miss Clarissa Rodney is very clever; she must be, if she can beat my Patty,' replied the widow.

'Well, I am sorry; and it's very unnatural of that girl to ask you to do without a servant. You had best have Annie back; you cannot manage alone. Who is to answer the bell for you, and to take any messages? It's not safe. I'll make it my business to come round this evening and have a talk with Patty myself.'

'I shall be glad to see you, Mrs Martin; but you will do no good. When Martha makes up her mind she sticks to it.'

'Well, I call it a shame. Here, shall I put one of these apples into the oven before I go?' asked Mrs Martin.

'No, thank you. Patty has arranged my dinner.

There is nothing you need do; but I thank you most kindly.'

Mrs Martin muttering not a little, and bestowing glances of compassion upon Mrs Moore, presently took her leave.

'I never liked her so little as I liked her to-day,' thought the widow; then leaning back in her chair, she fell into a fit of musing which was anything but cheerful. 'I must have Annie back,' was her thought. 'I cannot endure this loneliness.'

The clock still continued to tick out the minutes with malicious slowness. Mrs Moore determined to take her dinner out of the oven at twelve o'clock.

'It's an hour earlier than Annie gives it to me; but I never knew such a long morning, never in the whole course of my life,' she thought.

The widow now amused herself watching the clock. She was tired of knitting, and the moment the eight-day clock struck twelve she leant forward, opened the oven-door, and took out the plate of warmed-up potatoes and bacon which Martha had prepared for her. It was not at all well done, and the dinner looked anything but tempting. Mrs Moore, however, was thankful for small mercies; she drew the table towards her, helped herself to salt, poured out a glass of water, and took up her knife and fork. She was just in the act of putting the first mouthful of the food to her lips when she heard steps coming round from the front entrance to the back. 'Annie—it's Annie come to say good-bye. I shall be glad to see her,' thought the widow. 'She'll do a bit of washing up I know if I ask her, and she'll tell me the gossip.'

The steps which now approached nearer and nearer

were not the least like Annie's. They were the firm, measured steps of a man.

Mrs Moore bent forward, and her heart beat a trifle fast. Was it possible that a tramp, knowing of her lonely condition, had appeared on the premises? Oh! what should she do? How mad, how cruel of Patty to have left her in such a predicament. She was just about (by the aid of her crutches) to cross the kitchen floor and turn the big key in the lock when the latch was lifted, and a man looked in round the half-open door. He was a big, burly-looking man, with scanty reddish hair, gray, bushy whiskers, and twinkling blue eyes. He glanced with an almost comical expression at the rocking-chair in which Mrs Moore was seated, then with a hasty exclamation rushed forward.

'Why, Polly!' he exclaimed, 'Polly! By all that's wonderful, Polly, what are you doing there? What is it you are trying to eat? Don't you know me, Poll, my girl? Don't you know me?'

'Thomas!' she cried. She let both her hands fall to her sides; her face, which had been white as death, now grew prettily pink, and her eyes brightened.

'It can't be you, Tom?'

'But it is—it is,' said the man. 'Kiss me, Polly, for the sake of old times. I have come back safe and sound and—I've made my pile.'

'Oh, Tom! I thought you were dead.'

'No such thing. I thought too much of you for that to happen. Give us another kiss, little sister. It's good to see you, that it is, although you are altered.' Then the man came up to the rocking-chair, bent over Mrs Moore, took her slim white hands in his, and kissed her with much heartiness.

'I am the wanderer home again,' he said; 'but, I say, what on earth are you doing in this queer sort of place? I know your husband is dead; but you have a girl. You wrote to me about her—you told me—well, what I am not likely to forget. Oh, my dear Polly! there are a lot of threads to pick up.'

'So there are, Tom; but the sight of you when I made sure you were dead has given me a turn. I feel quite faint.'

'Have a glass of water. There now, you'll be better. What is that thing you are trying to eat?'

'My dinner.'

'Uncommon messy it looks. I thought I'd have a bit of dinner with you myself; but that compound on the plate doesn't look inviting. I ought to have sent you a wire; but I only landed last night, and thought I'd come straight on. Your last letter was dated three years back; but I didn't suppose you'd be doing much in the moving line.'

'No; we have been in this little cottage, Patty and I, for seven years. And are you well, Tom, and have you really come back for good?'

'I have a long story to tell,' replied the man; 'but may I take off my greatcoat? It is warm in here. You don't mind if I stay and chat with you a bit? I can scarcely believe my eyes. It is twelve years since I saw you last. You look as if more than twelve years had gone over your head, Matilda. You're not improved. I may as well be frank. When I saw you last you were as bonny a slip of a girl as the eye of man could rest on; now you are an old woman.'

'I have had trouble since,' she replied, 'a great deal of trouble. My husband, my dear good George, was

taken from me, and after that we were poor, and we came to this house. I'd like you to see the child, Tom.'

'Oh! she'll keep,' said the man. 'It's you I want to talk to. I have come back with a good bit of money, and I mean to stay in the old country if I can be made comfortable.' As he spoke he threw back his head and gazed around him. 'I thought maybe you'd put me up,' he said.

'We really have no room for you here, although I am sure Martha'——

'Ah! yes. Martha! It was good of you to name her after my mother; it was the sort of thing I am not likely to forget. So you have only one child?'

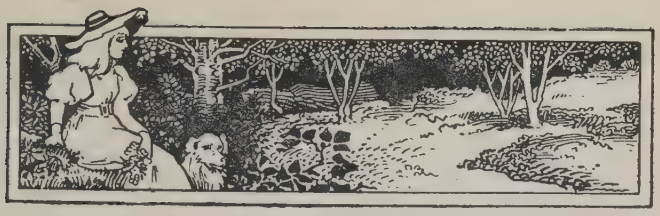
'Only one, bless her! as fine and clever and nice-looking a girl as the heart of woman could desire.'

'Oh, it goes without saying that you should praise your only chick; but we'll hear about her later,' said the man. 'Now then, Polly, I have come back, and I mean to make things comfortable for you. I have been thinking about you all the time I was away. I have never forgotten that you were good to me when I was a poor, miserable, rough, headstrong, disagreeable boy. My father thought nothing of me when he married again, and I couldn't have borne life if it hadn't been for you. You were a pretty, bright little thing in those days, and I was fond of you, although I seldom showed it. The one person that I worshipped, however, out and out, was my mother. My mother died when I was only seven years old, and I had a sort of feeling that when my father married again he had done her a cruel injustice, and you—you, poor little mite—used to let me talk of her to you. No one

else would, but you were never tired of it; and when you had a daughter, only one, you called her after my mother, although her name is a bit old-fashioned, and not up to date. So now, here 's my hand on it, Polly—you 'll want for nothing now that I have come home; you and that girl of yours shall have all that money can buy. This cottage won't suit my views, nor will it suit your views long. What are you sitting in the kitchen for?'

'Because'—— said Mrs Moore. 'Oh! is it true, Tom? It can't be true. It is like a story-book tale, that you have come back rich, and you are going to take'——

'I am going to take a big house, and put you in it, and that girl of yours, and do for you both. The only encumbrance will be your humble servant. I 'll want a place in that establishment. I 'll be master, but you 'll be mistress. I 'm not a marrying man, my dear; there 's no fear of my turning you out because of a fine lady-wife appearing on the scene. All I ask is that I may be master, but for the rest you and the girl can do as you please.'



CHAPTER XII.

THE TRANSFORMED KITCHEN.

ROUGH as a boy, Mrs Moore's step-brother, Thomas Jenkins, was still rough as a man; but the kind heart, which had looked out of his blue eyes as a little lad, was still there; and Mrs Moore felt a sense of intense comfort in his presence.

'It is like old times,' she said. 'You might poke up the fire a bit, if you have not forgotten the way?'

'I should just think I haven't. Hadn't I to do for myself when I was in Australia? When I was up in the bush, do you think I could get a servant to do a hand's-turn for me? No; it was Jenkins to the fore, or nobody; and you may be quite certain I didn't want for anything. But I say, Polly, you are not going to eat that stuff on your plate?'

'It is cold now; but you have been better than any dinner to me, Tom. It is pleasant to have you home once again.'

'Home to stay, if you please. I wonder what that Martha of yours will say to it. You call her Martha, do you?'

'Mostly Patty.'

'Better and better,' cried the man, slapping his knee

with a loud bang. 'My mother was Patty to those who knew her. I declare to you, Polly, there never was a more faithful step-sister than you; but you'll reap your reward now. I say, why shouldn't we both have a bit of something tasty to eat? I'm no end of a cook. I'll go out and be back again in a twinkling.'

'Oh no, Tom; you had better not. Martha will be in by-and-by, and I know she'll find something. We can have a cosy little supper all together then. You had better go out for your own dinner, Tom.'

'I'll dine with you or not at all.' Tom Jenkins once again put on his overcoat, placed his hat firmly on his head, and disappeared. He banged the kitchen-door after him; and Mrs Moore, the pink spots of colour on each cheek, sat and wondered at the curious and strange turn in the wheel of fortune. Of course she was delighted; she had always been fond of Tom. She knew that he was rough; but she had liked him when a little fellow. He had been good to her, for she was a delicate little thing in those days. The little sister who had come with the second marriage had been the one and only thing to soothe the heart of the angry boy; and as she grew older he had told her many tales of his own mother—who had been a rough sort of woman enough, but well meaning—and whom the boy now idealised.

When Polly Jenkins had married a man slightly above her in the social scale she had thought in a queer, vague sort of way of the woman whom every one else in the world, except Tom, had forgotten. So Mrs Moore called her own child after Tom's mother. Now she wondered what that child would say when she returned.

'She cannot but be delighted,' thought Mrs Moore. 'Tom has come back wealthy. He wants a big house, and we are to live in it with him; and all he asks is that he is to be master. That is fair enough. Of course, Patty will be charmed. How can she help it? No more money cares, no more—— Oh, I do declare! there he is back.'

Tom Jenkins returned in a noisy way. He had filled a basket with provisions. There were two bottles of stout, a great piece of rump-steak, a bag of onions, and some potatoes.

'Now for the frying-pan,' he said. 'I know how to cook a steak to a turn. You have got bread in the house, I hope?'

'I 'll see to things. Do sit still, Tom; it will do me good to move a bit,' said Mrs Moore, stretching out her hand for her crutch as she spoke.

'You sit where you are,' replied Jenkins, seizing the crutch and putting it at the other side of the room. 'We 'll just fancy, Polly, that you and I are kids again, and that I 'm doing a bit of cooking on the sly. Don't you remember the old days? Ha! ha! I've done a good bit of cooking between then and now.'

So Jenkins raked out the fire and made it glowing and clear, placed the gridiron on the top, and laid the steak on to grill. He grilled onions with it, and boiled potatoes; and the little kitchen was filled with a pungent and savoury smell. Then he warmed plates by the fire, and put bread and butter and salt on the table. Drawing the cork of a bottle of stout, and pouring out a glass for his sister and another for himself, he remarked, 'Now, that 's better. I 'll go

out presently and bring in something for supper. This dinner is prime.'

He ate with gusto; and Mrs Moore reflected with some comfort that Patty would not be back for two or three hours yet, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of her dinner. In the course of the meal Annie appeared on the scene.

'Who's yon little maid?' said Jenkins, turning to look at Annie, as in wild amazement, with her eyes round as globes, she gazed at the two. A savoury smell in that kitchen where everything was so sparse, so simple, so poor! A large, rough-looking, burly man eating a prodigious meal in the company of gentle Mrs Moore!

Annie rubbed her eyes to assure herself it was not a dream.

'This is the dear little servant I used to have, but who has left me,' said Mrs Moore. 'Come in, Annie; you have come to say good-bye?'

'Why did you leave your mistress, may I ask?' said Tom Jenkins. 'Don't stay there by the door. Come along in, and stand in front of me, and let me get a good look at you.'

Annie did come forward in a shy way.

'You ain't such a bad little lass,' said Jenkins, 'not by no means; and why did you go away from Mrs Moore? I don't favour people who are not true to their employers.'

'If you please, sir,' said Annie, 'I didn't want to go; I didn't really.'

'It was because'—— began Mrs Moore.

'You mean to say you have not got a servant?' interrupted Jenkins.

'It doesn't matter, dear; it doesn't really.'

'I am quite willing to be engaged on the spot as cook; but I don't care for the washing-up business.—Can't you stay, little girl?' Tom asked, turning to Annie.

'That I can, sir, if—if I may.'

'Say no more about it. Go into the scullery, or whatever you call that place, and turn to your duties. You're my servant now. I am responsible for your wages. I don't know that I'll keep you long. I'll say nothing about that until I see what you're worth; but you're my servant in future; and the better you serve Mrs Moore the better you'll please me. You understand that—eh?'

'Yes, sir,' said Annie.

'Annie,' said Mrs Moore, 'this gentleman is my brother come back from Australia.'

'Oh! ma'am, I am glad,' replied Annie, and the creases vanished from her anxious forehead and dimples surrounded her mouth. She had read romances, and had often thought of impossible brothers and cousins and uncles coming back from unknown regions with bags of gold in their pockets. Such things were true after all; they were not all dreams. Here was a real stranger from the other side of the world, who had returned with lots of money; he knew what was right, and that it was impossible for a lady to live without a servant, so he had reinstated the girl in the place she loved.

The meal proceeded merrily, and when it was over Jenkins stood up and stretched himself.

'I'll go for a walk now,' he said, 'and come back when that Patty of yours is home. I'd like to see

her, and give her a kiss for her mother's sake. If she 's a girl after my own heart, there will be few things I won't do for her. Now then, Polly, ta! ta! for the present. You have enjoyed your meal—eh?'

'Yes, very much indeed, dear Tom,' replied Mrs Moore.

Again he left the cottage noisily. His quick, measured steps were heard as he crossed the little plot outside; and then he vanished in the direction of the village street.

'Oh, ma'am,' exclaimed Annie, 'it 's too wonderful to be true.'

'But it is true, Annie, and we 'll never be in difficulties again. Only I wonder—I wonder—what Patty will say!'

'He seems a very kind gentleman,' said Annie. 'He gave me half-a-crown—he did really, ma'am; you can take it off my wages. I don't want nothing but to live with you; but my box ain't gone, and I 'll take it back again to my little attic. Oh, ma'am, I am so happy!'

'That 's right, Annie; so am I. I want you to light the fire in the parlour, and to make the room look as nice as possible, and then to help me to get back there. Patty will be pleased, and it will be half the battle if she sees me in the parlour when she comes home.'

'I 'll do my very best, ma'am,' replied Annie.

So the parlour was dusted and a bright fire lit. Mrs Moore had her rocking-chair removed there; helped by Annie, she then put on her best Sunday dress, and there she sat in state waiting for her brother and for her daughter. It was almost too wonderful—

like a fairy tale; if only Martha was satisfied, then, indeed, there was a golden future before the widow.

Jenkins had promised to return about six o'clock; he said he would bring a lot of provisions with him. Punctual to the moment, he appeared again at the cottage, followed by a boy loaded with brown paper parcels.

'Here we are!' Jenkins exclaimed boisterously; 'lay 'em here.—Hullo! where's your missus gone?' he asked, turning to Annie.

'Missus is in the parlour, of course, sir,' replied Annie.

'The parlour?' Jenkins raised his hand to his forehead and pushed back his rough hair. 'Then that's all right. But I liked best to have her in the kitchen somehow,' the man muttered under his breath. 'We used to snuggle up in the chimney-corner when she and I were young 'uns—she a little mite of three or four at the most, and I a big lad. Well, never mind, we must take things as we find 'em.'

Jenkins paid the boy, who straightway vanished; then he and Annie had a consultation.

Annie thought Jenkins quite a gentleman, and so regal in his ways. 'More than bounteous,' was her opinion; 'downright kingly.'

The parcels were found to contain many things which had never appeared in this humble kitchen before: groceries of various sorts and descriptions, cheese, meat, vegetables, different kinds of fruits, a nicely-trussed chicken, a ham, and many other dainties.

'We'll do,' Jenkins said, looking at Annie; 'and if you don't know how to cook, I'll manage. I'll cook the dinner to-night. I want to have a nice dinner

for your mistress and for Miss Patty. Miss Patty is a very hearty, merry sort of girl—eh? A merry, larky sort of girl—eh?'

Jenkins looked full at Annie as he spoke.

'Well, sir,' replied Annie in a dubious tone.

'Eh? What are you hesitating about?'

'Oh yes, sir,' Annie added quickly; 'yes, sir.'

'Then that's all right. I don't want none of your grand, stuck-up misses; but if Patty is worthy of her name, why'——

'What would you like me to cook for dinner, sir?'

'You lay the table—I know nothing about that; and I'll cook the dinner,' he replied.

'Oh! but really, sir!'

'No words, my girl. I doubt if you could do a fowl to please me; and as to the ham, we can't boil it in time, but we'll have rashers from it; and there's some more stout here. I'll get in wine to-morrow. Now then, let's turn to.'

Jenkins took off his coat, turned up his sleeves, and soon the most ravishing odours filled the small kitchen.

It was on this scene that Martha, tired from her long walk and day of study, entered.

CHAPTER XIII.

'STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.'

SO effectually had the story of Clarissa Rodney appealed to Martha Moore that she could think of nothing else all the way home; Clarissa's difficulty had shut out, for the time being, her own anxieties. From childhood Martha had devoted herself to thinking for others. Her father had been ill for two or three years before he died; and although quite a little child, she was accustomed to keep quiet for his sake, to sit near him for hours without speaking, to get his slippers for him, and to see that the book he liked best was close by his side. Shortly before his death her father had put his hand on the girl's broad forehead, had looked into the wonderfully deep gray eyes, and had said, 'Look after your mother. Don't forget that I leave your mother as my most solemn charge to you.'

The mother was delicate at the time, and soon after Mr Moore's death she became very feeble. Though she was gentle and refined, she was socially by no means her husband's equal.

Patty closely resembled her father. Mrs Moore

knew this, and was troubled as she speculated on the girl's reception of the new arrival.

'Of course she will be sensible about it,' thought the widow. 'She has always tried to please me—she would not hurt me now.'

Patty, still thinking of Clarissa Rodney, and wondering what she should say to her the next morning, and how she should best advise her, lifted the latch and entered the kitchen. She came round by the back way on purpose. Had she been less engrossed in thought, she would have observed, even before crossing the threshold, the bright light shining from the little lattice window, and the sound of voices. Perhaps, too, a whiff of the delicious odours of cooking might have greeted her nostrils. As it was, she stood blinking in the light of the warm, bright kitchen, and unable for a moment to realise where she was. Had she in her dreamlike way taken the wrong turning, and gone into somebody else's house?

'Why, where's mother?' she inquired; 'and who'—— She hesitated and stood still. A large man with red hair pushed back from his forehead, the moisture streaming from his face, his shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbows, was bending over the kitchen-range; he was in the act of dexterously turning a delicious ham-rasher. A heap of fried potatoes lay in a warm dish over a pot of boiling water, and a fowl done to a turn was already reposing on a dish.

'Has mother gone out of her mind? What—what has happened?' thought Patty.

'I say! one minute, my girl, one minute,' cried Jenkins. He popped the rasher of bacon on the dish

A large man with red hair . . . was bending over the kitchen-range.
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where the fowl lay, threw down the knife and fork he held in his hand, and came towards Martha.

'So you're Martha! So you're Patty! So you're the little girl I have been working for, and toiling for, and thinking of! Give me a kiss, my pretty—a good, hearty smack. I'm your Uncle Tom.'

Now, of course, Patty had heard of her Uncle Tom, her mother's step-brother, who lived at the other side of the world. As a child she had heard of him, and from time to time her mother had mentioned his name. As a child she had thought of him with awe. She used to call him, under her breath, *Vice Versâ*, for with him everything was reversed: he had winter when she had summer; he had long days when she had short; he was cold when she was hot; doubtless he was rich and she was poor. Of late years, however, she had seldom thought of him, for he had not written; and her mother surmised that poor Thomas had fared badly in the colonies, had made no money, and was probably dead. Martha used to listen with a certain respect and even interest to her mother's old reminiscences of her half-brother, Thomas Jenkins; but when she saw this rough-looking man—rougher-looking than any man she was in the habit of seeing—and when he demanded a kiss, her emotions were far from pleasurable. An angry flush mounted to her forehead.

'I don't know you. I am surprised to see you,' she said. She did not give the kiss, but walked haughtily from the kitchen into the little parlour.

Mrs Moore, in her very best costume, was seated bolt upright in the rocking-chair. The table in the centre of the room had been laid for dinner by the excited servant-maid.

Martha closed the door behind her.

'What does this mean, mother?' she said. 'What has happened? I left you this morning in the kitchen without a servant; I come back to find Annie here, you back in the parlour, a great dinner in preparation, and a—a *man* here, mother.'

'Your Uncle Tom, darling, my step-brother—your Uncle Thomas who has come back, Martha. It is delightful, dear child. We shall be rich in the future.'

'Rich!' exclaimed Martha in a tone of disgust; 'rich with him!'

'Have you seen him, my darling? Oh, I know he is just a little rough; but he has a kind heart. You won't—you won't turn against him, Martha. If your father were alive'——

Martha put up her hand to her head. She said wearily, 'I don't understand. I am tired and—and dazed. I see you have everything you want for the present. I'll go up to my room.'

There was a little staircase which led from the parlour to the bedrooms beyond; Martha used it now. It was a way of escape from the kitchen, with its odious occupant and its coarse superabundance. She entered her own little room, so very tiny, bare, and starved-looking; and turning the key in the lock, flung herself face downwards on the bed.

'Oh, I can't bear it!' she muttered; 'he wanted me to kiss him. To kiss him! Oh, it is horrible! I can't bear it.'

Tears slowly came into her eyes as she thought of her father, so gentle, so refined, so scholarly. She lit a candle, put it on the dressing-table, and hastily opened

a little morocco case which contained his portrait. Her tears fell on the picture.

'You would not expect me to appreciate him?' she thought, mentally addressing the face, with its gray eyes and sensitive mouth. 'I did all you asked me; I did all—all. I have always put mother first; but you never thought of this: that he would come back—a man like that, and that I should have to—to act as though I liked him. I cannot do it, father. I don't mind a bit how poor we are; but don't, don't expect me to like riches of that sort.'

There was a tap at her door.

'If you please, Miss Martha, supper's ready,' called the excited voice of Annie.

Martha crossed the room, opened the door, and stood on the threshold.

'Please tell mother,' she said, 'that I have a headache, and have gone to bed. I am not at all hungry.'

'Oh, but Miss Martha, really it is such a beautiful supper; and he's the most bounteous, wonderful gentleman. He's given me half-a-crown; and I can do without any wages from your mother. He says I am to stay here, and he'll pay my wages; and I'm that happy. Oh, Miss Martha'——

But Annie spoke to empty air, for Martha had shut her bedroom door and locked it.

Downstairs Mrs Moore waited with keen anxiety.

'Come in, Annie,' she said as the girl appeared. 'Did you tell Miss Martha; is she coming down?'

'Now don't you fret, ma'am. Miss Martha has got a bit of a headache. Pride I call it, for a more delightfully kind gentleman never lived. It's his red hair, I'm thinking, ma'am. Miss Martha never could abide

red hair; and I know, for mother told me, that there 's a dye that turns it black. Maybe, ma'am, you could get the gentleman to use it. I 'd run to town and get a bottle. I would this very night if you wished it.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Annie. Bring in supper.'

Mrs Moore's happy expectation had failed, and she now felt more depressed than usual. If Martha chose to behave in this way, all her beautiful castle in the air might tumble about her ears. She forgot that Martha could not be expected to look on Uncle Tom as she did. Martha had no memories of tender early days, nor could she know how kind was the heart which beat beneath that rough exterior.

Thomas Jenkins had, however, a peculiarity of character: he could be very kind, and he could also be very sulky—as morose as a bear with a sore head. He came in now as Annie placed the fowl, the ham, and the vegetables on the table. He had washed his hands at the sink, pulled down his shirt sleeves, and put on his coat; he had looked at his own reflection in the little square of glass which Annie had placed for her convenience in the tiny scullery, and had said to himself that he was quite as presentable a man as could be found in the length and breadth of England. He entered his sister's presence and looked eagerly round.

'Well,' he said, 'dinner is served. Where 's the lass?'

'She 's tired, Thomas; she 's not coming down to-night. The child is working very hard just now, and has a headache.'

'Polly, when you begin to talk nonsense I don't like you half so well as when you were the downright truthful little thing you were ages and ages ago. Let

us fall to, whether Martha chooses to be here or not. The chicken is done to a turn; let me help you to the liver-wing. You like liver-wing; you always did as a little tot.'

Mrs Moore had to own that even if Martha did choose to absent herself the liver-wing of a tender chicken would be a tasty morsel.

Jenkins carved to perfection. He helped his sister to some of the good things provided, and took a comfortable meal himself; but he spoke very little. There was a cloud on his brow, and his blue eyes were somewhat perturbed. He occasionally looked round him, and once or twice muttered words which Mrs Moore could not catch.

Annie flew in and out of the room, her cheeks blazing and her heart on fire with pride and happiness.

'If only Miss Martha wouldn't make herself disagreeable—if only Miss Martha wouldn't make herself quite such a goose!—what a delightful evening this would be.'

'There,' said Jenkins, pushing back his chair, 'you can remove the things, Annie. There 's a nice leg of the chicken for yourself, my girl; take a good supper.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied Annie, as she took everything away.

Jenkins ordered some hot water and glasses to be brought in. He had bought a bottle of wine, and now proceeded to brew what he called sherry-negus for his sister.

All this time he did not allude to Martha. Annie in the kitchen meanwhile was hastily preparing a tempting little meal. The leg of the chicken, all that was left of that succulent bird, was put upon a plate for

Martha. Annie even ventured to cut from the new ham a tender rasher, which she did to a turn. With these she went softly upstairs, and knocked at Martha's door, saying, 'If you please, Miss Martha, do open.'

Martha did open. There stood Annie with the tray of delicious food. Martha had scarcely tasted food that day, and a sick longing came over her when she saw the dainties.

'No,' she said. 'My head aches; I cannot eat. I'll be all right in the morning. Take it all away, Annie.'

'Oh, if you only would, miss; it's beautiful. I never seed the missus so happy. If you only would come downstairs, even to the kitchen. Do take a bite of the fowl, miss.'

'I'm not hungry,' Martha replied, knowing as she spoke that she was telling a lie. Annie, tears filling her eyes, returned to the kitchen with the rejected supper. There were certainly times when Miss Moore was a very troublesome young lady.

Meanwhile, Jenkins, having finished his glass of sherry and water, turned to his sister, and remarked, 'Well, Polly, this is rather an impact—eh?'

'What do you mean?' she answered.

'I mean the girl. She don't take after you, if she has been named ten times after my blessed mother.'

'She takes after her father,' Mrs Moore replied with a touch of pride in her tone. 'You never saw him, you know, Tom.'

'I never wanted to,' muttered Tom Jenkins.

'He was a wonderful man, Tom, quite wonderful, and a great scholar; he had a most gifted mind. He was a most'——

'A most airified gent. I know the sort,' muttered Jenkins under his breath.

'You would like, perhaps, to see his portrait? It 's there on my writing-table. Bring it to me.'

Jenkins looked at Mrs Moore. He saw that, happy as she was, she was fretting.

'If that girl dares to give her trouble, I 'll knock her pride out of her. She has got to know that I 'm her master; if she don't, we won't stable our horses long together—that 's a certain fact.' These were Uncle Tom's thoughts as he crossed the room and looked at the photograph of the late Mr Moore, remarking inaudibly, 'a conceited snob,' and then returning to his chair.

'I can see, Polly,' he resumed, 'that your girl takes after her father. You 're right there. She has got the same twist of the lip. Now, to be frank with you, I don't take to that sort; they 're not homely enough for me—they 've too many airs for your humble servant. I hoped that, being named after the mother, she might have got a bit of her nature; but hopes are doomed to be shattered in this world—eh, Polly? Poor old girl, I don't blame you; but now you 've got to listen. If that proud miss isn't agreeable to what I have to propose, why, I go; and if I go, I take my money with me. I can't stand a young miss who won't even give her own uncle a kiss when he asks for it.'

'She was surprised, Tom; she wasn't expecting to see you. You don't know what a good girl she is, and how clever. She 'll be all right in the morning, and you 'll like her very much when you know her.'

'Maybe so, Polly, and I don't want to annoy you or to make you anxious, my dear; but I don't feel like

loving her at present. She's given me a slap just when I was feeling my happiest and most amiable. I know I'm a rough fellow, but I have got a kind heart; and if a girl is worth her salt she ought to meet her own uncle half-way. She gave me a cruel hit, straight from the shoulder, when she came into that kitchen to-night, and I've not forgotten it. I'll leave you now, Polly, and I'll come back in the morning—and if by then young miss has humbled herself, and is willing to take the good I'm willing to offer, all will be well; if not—why, Polly, I'm sorry, but I'll go elsewhere and take my bag of gold with me. Now, good-night, my dear. It was a pleasure to see you, and you did a kindness to me which I shall never forget when you named that girl after my mother; but as to her being like mother, bless my dear mother's memory! she could no more have done what that impudent hussy did to-night than she could have flown. Good-night to you, Polly. Don't fret, old girl.'

Jenkins rose, kissed his sister, went into the kitchen, had a laughing, joking word with Annie, whose admiration for him was unbounded, and presently left the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DILEMMA.

LEFT alone, Mrs Moore reflected long over the advisability of having a talk with her daughter that evening. She had but to raise her crutch and knock on the ceiling to summon Martha to her presence; she was tempted to do so, for the house was quiet now, and the comfortable sensation of her good dinner still lingered. The atmosphere of Thomas Jenkins, that excellent though rough step-brother, seemed to pervade the place. After careful consideration, however, she wisely refrained.

'I'll let the girl sleep over it,' she thought. 'I can't understand her conduct in keeping away and annoying me because Tom happens to have red hair and a somewhat rough manner. I can't understand her; but all the same I am proud of my girl. She resembles her father, and her father was a man of good family. Martha is a lady, every inch of her; she has been brought up as one. Poor Tom, of course, can't comprehend her ways.'

With the aid of Annie, who was still loquacious and excited, Mrs Moore returned to her own room for the night. She went to bed and dreamed golden dreams;

and in the morning summoned Annie once more to assist her downstairs to breakfast in time to meet Martha before she started for school.

Martha came in at the last moment, buttoning her jacket. Her worn-out sailor hat was placed somewhat crookedly on her head, and altogether she looked slovenly.

'Ah! Patty,' said her mother, 'give me a kiss, darling. Your head is better—is it not?'

'Thank you, mother,' replied Martha, 'my head is quite well.'

Mrs Moore looked the girl all over with anxious eyes; but Patty's eyes were averted. She sat down, poured out a cup of tea, and drank it off without any remark; even a newly-opened tin of sardines, and some fresh eggs, hot and tempting, which graced the table, were unnoticed. She cut a thick piece of bread and buttered it; the bread was stale, but Martha ate it with the relish of a youthful and very keen appetite.

'You are so fond of sardines; do have one, darling,' said the mother.

'Not this morning, mother, thank you.'

'Nor an egg? Mrs Martin brought those eggs, so perhaps you wouldn't mind eating one.'

Martha suddenly smiled. The situation seemed to her to be on the verge of the grotesque. In another instant she would have laughed; in two minutes she might find herself in hysterics. So she jumped up hastily, saying, 'Not even one of Mrs Martin's eggs. I have no time. Good-bye, dear mother.' Then she ran up to her mother and bent to kiss her.

Mrs Moore took both of the girl's hands and clasped them nervously. 'Martha,' she said, 'need

you go so early? You never go as early as this, and I came down on purpose.'

'I cannot stay now, mother. I am starting a little earlier than usual because I have to meet a girl, one of my school companions, who is in trouble.'

'What girl?' asked Mrs Moore.

'Her name is Clarissa Rodney.'

'Oh! the daughter of the Professor. They are rich people. Need you worry about their cares? There is a woman in trouble here, and she is your mother, and you neglect her for a stranger.'

'I must see the girl, mother; I promised. I am sorry you are in trouble; I did not know it.'

'Martha, you must just listen to one remark. I should be quite the happiest woman in England to-day, the least anxious woman, the most thankful woman, the woman with the brightest, most assured future before her, if it were not for you.'

'For me, mother? Oh, mother, need we speak of this now?'

'We have to face it, Martha. If you refuse to—to meet my brother, Thomas Jenkins, he goes and leaves us just as we were. Our future rests with you, and you had better know it. He is hurt at the way you treated him last night. He has a heart of gold, and he has gold in his pocket too, and will spend it on us. If you refuse we lose everything. We shall be poor—starving; you cannot do what you want, you will be always crippled in resources; and I love him, Patty. I don't see his roughness as you do, but I see the love shining beneath. He was brought up roughly, poor fellow, and he lived a rough life. He cannot be blamed for not having the polish he never

had an opportunity of getting; and he would be—oh! so proud of you, and fond of you.'

'I cannot stay now, mother. I have heard every word. I will let you know to-night. Good-bye, mother; good-bye.'

Martha stooped and kissed her mother; a sudden tear splashed on the mother's face. The next instant she had left the house, and was walking quickly to school, her heart beating so fast that once or twice she stopped in fear of suffocation.

'How can I attend to my work this morning? How can I do all that I desire when this horror, this nightmare, oppresses me?' she thought. 'Though I am going to meet Clarissa I have not given her trouble any consideration. Oh! what is to be done?'

Then an inspiration came to Martha. She stopped and smiled; some of her burden seemed to roll away. It was this: 'Suppose, this morning, Clarissa and I change places. Yesterday she told me of her difficulty, and pretty formidable it is in all conscience. Suppose to-day I tell her mine. I will.'

Martha hurried on her way; she quickened her steps to a run. She had a kind of premonition that Clarissa would be watching for her behind one of the blinds of the windows of the tall house. This conjecture was correct, for the very instant she crossed to the side of the street where Professor Rodney's house stood, the hall door was opened, and Clarissa ran down the steps and came eagerly across to Martha Moore, holding out her hand.

'We have a quarter of an hour and more. How good of you!' she cried. 'Have you thought—have you considered?'

'I am dreadfully sorry, Clarissa,' said Martha. 'I did think a little—a little in the night, and a little yesterday between classes; but I—I have a trouble of my own. May I tell it to you, Clarissa?'

'Of course you may,' said Clarissa. 'My affairs don't press awfully yet. I told the doctor I would not pay him for quite a month, so he won't expect it. Father is getting better. Oh, it is wonderful how much better he is! I have just seen him, and he kissed me, with the old look in his eyes. I wish you knew my father, Martha.'

'I am not likely to know him,' replied Martha with regret.

'Why not?' asked Clarissa. 'My father would take a great interest in a clever girl like you. Oh, Martha! you have got such a nice face; but I wish you were a wee bit more particular about your dress. I know, of course, you are poor; but you could wear your hat straight, and brush the mud off your skirt, and'—— Clarissa coloured, wondering at her own audacity. 'I know you are horribly proud; but you don't mind my telling you? The fact is, I want to be your friend —a real friend.'

'Don't say any more until you know the story,' said Martha. 'I don't pretend,' she added, her voice trembling, 'that the thought of having you as a friend, a real friend, would not bring such joy and sunshine into my life that —— But, there, I never had a friend like you. I have always been poor, and only the poorer girls in the school seem to take any notice of me; and—I can't help it, Clarissa—the poor girls at our school—well, I don't care for them. It's not because they are poor; but they are shabby

in soul too, and I can't stand shabby-souled people. I never could.'

'Of course you can't,' said Clarissa, who thought this a most high-sounding and noble speech. She linked her hand through Martha's arm. 'Let's go slowly. I like you better each moment I talk to you; and now please tell me what your trouble is; it can't be worse than mine at any rate.'

'I don't know about that. There must be an end to your trouble some day or other; but it seems to me there never can be an end to mine—never.'

'Oh, Martha! what has happened? Is your mother —the mother you love so much—very ill?' cried Clarissa.

'No; she is well, and she is happy. At least, she would be happy if it were not for me. But there, I must tell you, and I must be quick about it. That horrid school-bell will ring, and we will have to go in; and if I don't relieve my mind first, why, I'll do something desperate—that's all.'

'You do look queer,' said Clarissa; 'your face is almost green, and the shadows under your eyes are quite too black for beauty. I believe you don't eat half enough.'

'If I do what I suppose will be considered right I shall have plenty to eat in the future,' Martha replied. 'You won't have to complain of that, nor of my shabby dress either. I shall be rich—yes, what is considered rich. But I am quite sure you will then pass on one side of the street and I on the other. You will nod to me, perhaps at first kind-heartedly; but soon you will be sorry to know me, and sorry that I am at the same school with you. It will be quite

natural for you to act in that way, and I shall not blame you.'

'Now, indeed, you talk riddles,' said Clarissa. 'Did you lose your wits in the night? Are you quite well?'

'I will tell you the story. Yesterday we were the poorest of the poor. We were so dreadfully poor that I got mother to send our only servant away; and mother is lame and cannot do anything herself. I got her rocking-chair into the kitchen, and put her dinner in the oven, where she could reach it; and on the way to school I wondered how even with all these economies we were ever to pay our way. Then I met you, and you talked to me of your own trouble; it helped me to forget mine, and I thought of you a good deal during the day. It was so good of you to confide in me. All the way home last night I was thinking of you, and wondering in what way I could possibly help you; but I did not see any way. You occupied all my thoughts, and I was proud that a girl like you should make a friend of me. I got home and opened the kitchen door. I expected to see mother sitting, perhaps, in the dark, and the fire nearly out, and the whole place dismal; and I thought how quickly I would light the lamp, and rake up the fire, and get the very best supper I could for my darling mother.'

'Well, you expected to see a dismal, dark kitchen. What did you see?' asked Clarissa.

'What did I see?' repeated Martha, suddenly springing from her companion's side and facing her. 'I saw this: the kitchen full of light, the stove almost red hot, a number of dishes about, with roast chicken

on one, fried potatoes on another, and there was a smell of frying pervading the whole house. Worse than all, there was a great red-haired man, with his sleeves up to his elbows, frying ham.'

'It sounds quite funny and delicious,' said Clarissa, laughing.

'Funny! Delicious! Is that what you think? Wait till you hear.'

'Well, anyhow, it almost gives me an appetite,' Clarissa replied. 'You must have enjoyed your supper.'

Martha paused for a moment and looked full at her school companion.

'Well, go on,' Clarissa continued. 'You have made me frightfully curious.'

'The man wiped his hands and turned, saying "Hullo!" He came up to me, and what do you think he said? "I'm your Uncle Tom Jenkins, come back from Australia; give me a kiss." Those were his words.'

Martha paused. She had come to a sort of anti-climax; she could not explain any further, particularly as she saw evidence of suppressed laughter in Clarissa's eyes.

'If you laugh I shall hate you as much as ever I liked you,' she cried with emphasis.

'Oh, I won't, not after a minute; but you put it so funnily. Did you kiss him?'

'Kiss him? No! I remembered my father, who was a gentleman; and I left the room and went into the parlour where mother was in her very best dress. Mother was as pleased as anybody could be, and I asked her what it meant. She told me that my uncle

had come back, and was giving us supper. Then I went upstairs to my room.'

'And you didn't have any of the delicious supper after all?'

'Not quite. I am proud, as proud as you are, Clarissa.'

'I never knew that I was specially proud,' answered Clarissa. 'I don't think I should have been so desperately proud as to refuse that supper. I am so fond of roast chicken; and as to rashers of ham—oh! don't describe things too minutely, Martha.'

'I won't; but now I have told you my trouble.'

'Only, I don't see where the trouble comes in.'

'That horrid man, who is my uncle—my step-uncle, my mother's half-brother—has come back rich, very rich, and he evidently means to live with us and to'——

'Well, and what then?'

'Can't you see for yourself? Could you endure such a man always near you?'

'I have not seen him. I cannot say until I see him.'

'Clarissa, you astonish me. I thought you would have been sympathetic.'

'Perhaps I shall be sympathetic when I see him. There are plenty of coarse and vulgar people in the world; but he may not be that sort. He may be rough without being coarse, and he may be unpolished without being vulgar. Father once explained the distinction, and I now consider very carefully before I pronounce any person really vulgar, and really coarse.'

'There's the school-bell, Clarissa. I don't think you have comforted me much.'

'I wish I could comfort you; but your news has quite astonished me. I tell you what, Martha: may I come home with you this evening? It would be a great treat to me, and I could see your uncle for myself, and afterwards I might be able to advise you.'

'Would you really?' asked Martha. 'Mother would be delighted, and of course there will be plenty now in the house.'

The school-bell rang loudly. The girls entered through the gates, which were immediately closed behind them.

CHAPTER XV.

PROFESSOR RODNEY.

ONLY a few girls living near the big school went home to lunch; the majority had that meal at the school. Clarissa, for reasons of economy, always went home in the middle of the day; Mrs Rodney thought it was cheaper to lunch at home than to pay a shilling a day for the school-dinner. Clarissa was often annoyed at this, as it prevented her enjoying the society of the companions she really cared about.

To-day, however, she ran all the way, excited at the thought of supping with Martha Moore in the evening. She knew her mother would give her leave; but that sanction was necessary if she would go with an easy conscience.

Mrs Rodney was at home; she was also in a good humour. The Professor was rapidly regaining health and strength; he was even allowed to sit up for a few minutes at a time, and Sister Agnes had assisted him not half-an-hour before to the sofa in his room. He had enjoyed his dinner, consisting of a little chicken and a glass of strong Burgundy, and was now examining with languid interest some books which had arrived by post.

Therefore, Mrs Rodney, her heart at rest with regard to her great anxiety, was disposed to be lenient towards her lesser cares. She termed her daughters her 'lesser cares;' and neither Clarissa nor Janet enjoyed the designation.

Janet always dined at the preparatory school she attended; so Clarissa now entered the big dining-room in her somewhat noisy fashion. 'Mother, here I am!' she cried.

'Is not that a self-evident fact, my dear?' replied the mother. 'Take off your hat and push back your hair; it is a little untidy. Here is a leg of chicken for you.'

'Oh, how very nice, mother! I so seldom get chicken, and I do enjoy it.' She sat down to the table and helped herself to potatoes. Then suddenly raising her eyes, a sparkle of fun shining in their dark depths, Clarissa said, 'Mother, do you know I met a girl to-day who absolutely cried because she was offered chicken and ham for supper?'

'She must be a particularly silly, fanciful girl,' replied Mrs Rodney. 'Pray don't tell me any more about her. I am glad to be able to inform you, Clare, that your father is decidedly better to-day.'

'Oh, good news!' cried Clarissa. 'Has the doctor seen him?'

'Yes; and do you know that wonderful doctor, Sir John Carbery, is coming here again on Thursday.'

'Oh, mother, is he really?'

'He is; it is all arranged. He wrote to Dr Bennett proposing it himself; and the payment of the fee is arranged. I suppose the same friend, Mr'——

Clarissa jumped suddenly to her feet. 'I cannot stay any longer.'

'Not stay, my dear? Absurd.'

'I want to run up and see father—may I? I have had as much as I can eat.'

'Your appetite is falling off. This is most provoking, just when I happened to have a specially nice lunch for you. You need not expect much of a dinner to-night, because'——

'Oh, mother, I was coming to that. Martha Moore, quite one of our very nicest girls—so refined, mother, and so clever—has asked me to sup with her. May I go, mother, please?'

'May you go? I have never heard you speak of—what name did you say?'

'Moore, mother—Martha Moore. She is a very nice girl, mother; I am sure you would like her.'

'And where does she live?'

'In one of Freeman's Cottages, just outside the town.'

'It is a good way off; but I believe I can send one of the servants for you. Yes, my dear, go by all means.'

'Thank you so much, mother. You will tell Janey, won't you, that I won't be in until late?'

'If I remember it, dear. Now, don't stay too long with your father; he cannot stand more than a few minutes' conversation with any one. Be sure you don't tire him.'

Clarissa replied that she would be careful, and left the room, trembling slightly. So Sir John Carbery meant to pay them a second visit. Should she, or should she not, tell him how her affairs stood? Oh! she could not. She could not face this kind, great,

clever doctor, and tell him that after all she had brought him here on false pretences, had in fact told him that she would do something she could not do. Doubtless his fee was not much to him; but Clarissa felt her honour was a great deal to her.

'I will pay him,' thought the girl; 'but how am I to get the money? I am not responsible for the second visit, I know; but he must have the thirty-five guineas I promised him—he must. It would kill me to fail in my word.'

She pressed her hand to her forehead. The gaiety she had felt for a moment or two deserted her now, and the memory of the herculean task which lay before her pressed heavily. She was now in her father's room, the largest and best bedroom in the house. Clarissa pushed aside the curtain which was stretched across the door; her slim young figure, her anxious and bright face made a charming picture, framed in the doorway.

The Professor, lying on a sofa, looked up, and smiled when he saw her. His eyes and the girl's were very much alike. He spoke in a low voice: 'Ah, Clare! this is good. I have longed to see you. How much time can you give the old father?'

'As many minutes as ever I can spare from school, pater.'

Mr Rodney glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. 'It is half-past one; when does school begin?' he asked.

'At two, father,' Clarissa replied. 'I can run there in ten minutes. I can stay for twenty beautiful whole minutes with you, if you will have me.'

'I do not think I shall particularly want to send

you away, Clarissa. I have been thinking, and it is bad for me to think. It will divert my mind to talk to you. Take this low chair.'

But Clarissa did not. She flung herself on her knees by the sofa, and then tumbled to a sitting posture on the floor, one of her hands clasped in the very long, slender hand of the man she adored. Presently she raised the slim fingers, and pressed them to her lips.

'If you had died! If you had died!' thought the girl. Her whole heart swelled within her. She had difficulty in keeping back her tears.

'What is the matter?' asked the Professor, looking at her. 'Out with your thoughts, my little girl.'

'I was thinking, father, that if you had not got better'——

'If I had died, for instance?' said Mr Rodney quietly.

'I believe I would have died too, father.'

'You think so, my child,' he answered. He paused for a moment, then laid his hand softly on her head. 'You think so; but you would have lived. You would have felt grieved for a time—all affectionate girls do, when such a bereavement is sent to them; but you would have got over the grief, and been a happy girl again, and a brave woman, and followed in those of my steps which are worthy to walk in.'

'They are all worthy, my dear, darling father,' murmured the girl.

'No, my child; I am only human, and I have often done things and felt things and said things I ought not to have felt or said or done. The best in me, I trust, you would have adopted, and the worst—God

would have buried the worst out of sight. But never mind, Clare, I am better; and it is by the agency of that wonderful physician, Sir John Carbery. I could not possibly have sent for him; but Providence raised up a friend in my need.'

Clarissa felt agitated. The Professor was gazing across the room.

'The pain is gradually diminishing,' he continued; 'every day I mount a little step higher on the hill to perfect health. The disease has been mastered. In three months I expect to be as well and strong as ever. Now that the worst symptoms have decidedly disappeared, I shall be able to resume the work which delights me, and I can, if necessary, give you some special lessons in languages and literature.'

'By the way, father, there is one other girl I wish you would coach,' said Clare.

'I dare say I could take a private pupil.'

'But I want you to take her for nothing—for charity, for love of me.'

'I would do more than that for love of you. But what is the girl's name?'

'Martha Moore. She is so nice, and she is wonderfully clever. You would enjoy imparting some of your information to her. I know she is a girl after your own heart.'

'She must be a girl worthy of encouragement, particularly if you speak so highly of her. I think I remember her. By the way, she and you were both competing for the Randall Scholarship?'

'Yes, father.' Clarissa moved uneasily.

'I recall her face—a sallow girl, with big gray eyes, a nice face, and very untidy in her person.'

'Oh yes, that is poor Martha to the life. She is such a funny mixture. I am going to tea with her to-night. May I tell her that when you are really better you will give her lessons with me during next term?'

'You may. You can both come to my study. I shall not be allowed to take much exercise for some time.'

Clarissa patted her father's hand. 'That is my own good darling daddy,' she said. 'You always contrive to make me happy, and to give me a stimulus.'

'By the way, Clare, you might come to me some evenings now to help me with my annotations of the Greek Testament. You have a very pretty taste for Greek, and a pure accent.'

Clarissa coloured under these words of praise.

'Yes, I am getting much better,' continued Mr Rodney. 'It is such a relief to your mother. For my part, I should have been absolutely willing had the result of this severe illness been otherwise; but she, dear soul'——

'We won't talk of it, father. You are getting better. It is God's will that you should live and help a lot of people,' cried the girl with enthusiasm.

'I have been thinking,' Mr Rodney said slowly, 'that it must have been my old friend Sarson—George Sarson—who got Carbery to visit me. It was the sort of thing Sarson would do, and of course he would not let me know about it. I shall have to thank him very delicately. I had a line from him this morning, offering to come and see me. He will be here in a week or two.—Why, what's the matter, Clare? Are you well? I never saw you so nervous.

Believe me, my dear, want of calm is a very bad sign. I have always taught you to take things with equanimity, not to give yourself away. I have endeavoured to instil into you lessons of'——

'Father, I really must go. You are getting quite pink in the cheeks, and that dreadful Sister Agnes will scold. I must go—I know I must.'

Clarissa bent down and kissed her father. As she was leaving the room she heard him murmur again: 'It must have been George Sarson, and he did it very delicately—very delicately—just like him. I shall endeavour to thank him.'

CHAPTER XVI.

CLARISSA AND UNCLE TOM.

WHEN she got back to school, Clarissa had just time to shout across the playground to Martha Moore: 'I am coming with you this evening, Martha. Be sure you wait for me after school.'

Martha nodded, and her face flushed with pleasure. 'Clarissa will be a shield between me and—and that dreadful other person,' she thought.

The two girls met when school was over, and immediately started on their walk to Freeman's Cottages. The evening happened to be very fine; and although it was winter now a young moon was shedding a tender radiance in the sky. They walked briskly, their lips moving quickly, and many eager utterances came from their young hearts.

Clarissa told her friend what her father had said that afternoon. 'It will do him good,' she concluded, 'and it will be easier for him to give lessons to two girls than one. You are not to pay anything for the lessons, Martha, because—because I love you, and I want you to be a very special friend of mine; and we will work at those subjects we care most for side by side and hand in hand. I do hate myself

when I remember that I took the scholarship from you, as you must want it even more than I do.'

'I always thought you were very rich,' said Martha bluntly. 'You live in such a big house, and your father is a great man, respected and looked up to. It seems rather ridiculous that you should say you have not money enough.'

'It is difficult, I know, to explain,' replied Clarissa, 'for we do live in a big house; but then the house goes with the Professorship, and father must live in it whether he likes it or not. We have a position to keep up, and that is what makes things so hard. You may be quite certain that unless we were very poor father and mother would not have hesitated to send for Sir John Carbery.'

'I wish with all my heart I could help you about that,' said Martha. 'It is terrible for you; but here we are just at home. Perhaps my dreadful uncle will not be present.'

'I hope he will. I want to see him very much indeed.'

Mrs Moore had been informed that Martha was bringing a schoolfellow home with her. A girl living in a cottage near by, who had gone home early, had brought a note telling her of the visitor. Both mistress and maid were much excited at the information.

'The daughter of the great Professor Rodney, Annie. We must have a nice supper, and it will be easy on this occasion—will it not?'

'By the kindness of the good gentleman, we can make it quite easy,' the maid replied.

So the parlour was swept and dusted until not

the faintest shadow of that enemy to domestic comfort—dust—could be seen anywhere. The little lamp was trimmed and burning brightly, and the red curtains were drawn across the lattice windows. The fire blazed up, too, and the best damask cloth was spread on the centre table. Annie had garnished that lovely rosy ham, which was now duly boiled and fit for eating; the tea was infused; and, having even ventured to try a recipe for particularly appetising hot tea-cakes, she had just placed them on the table when the latch of the kitchen door was raised and the two girls entered.

Mrs Moore, dressed in her best, was waiting in the parlour to receive Clarissa and make much of her, and Martha looked round her with a sense of relief when she perceived that no red-haired Uncle Tom was to be seen.

She hurried her friend upstairs, to take off her hat and coat, and afterwards interviewed Annie. 'I thought—I somehow expected—that Mr Jenkins would be in,' she said.

'He ain't here, miss, I mourn to say,' replied the girl in a very solemn tone, her blue eyes shining mistily in the midst of her freckled face.

'Why do you speak in that extraordinary voice?' Martha inquired.

'Because me and the missus, we has been a-fretting over it,' replied Annie. 'There, miss; there ain't no use in hiding our feelings. The missus and me we have been downright fretting. We have been listening for a footfall all day, that has never come nigh us. It's a good footfall, and it means victuals and wages; it means comforts and kind

words and riches, Miss Martha; and they as turns up their noses at these good things, why, Miss Martha, they ain't to be pitied. If they turn away the good things of life given by those nearest to them they 're to be blamed, Miss Martha. I said as I would say it, even if I did so with a bursting heart; and now it 's out, miss; and if you will go in and eat some of the hot cakes made with Mr Jenkins's butter, and some of the ham bought with his money, and the tea with cream in it, and all the other good things, why, eat them, Miss Martha—eat them, and don't keep the missus waiting.'

Martha did not feel called upon to make any reply to this remarkable speech. Had she done so she would have said something she might have regretted; therefore, returning to the little parlour, she sat down before the tea-tray and poured out the tea.

Clarissa was seated close to the widow, chatting away in her pleasantest and most lively style.

'But I thought your step-brother had come back?' she said presently. 'Martha told me Mr Jenkins had just returned from Australia. I am quite curious to see him.'

Martha flashed an angry glance at her friend, but Clarissa took no notice of it.

'I am sorry to say my dear brother has not been in to-day,' replied Mrs Moore. There was a slight tremulousness in her voice, which she sincerely hoped Martha did not notice.

'Come, mother,' said Martha a little brusquely, for she could scarcely keep in her sense of annoyance, 'the tea will be spoilt. Shall we begin?'

'If you please, my love,' said Mrs Moore in a gentle voice.

The three ladies now surrounded the tea-table, and Annie whisked in and out, pleased and proud to attend on them.

Clarissa owned to herself that whatever might be Martha Moore's poverty, she had seldom enjoyed a more delicious meal. The cakes were so good that Annie was praised to her face, whereupon she became almost purple, and her blue eyes shone as bright as stars. The ham was also done to a turn, the cream was delicious, the tea of good quality.

Mrs Moore felt now that truly Tom was atoning for any roughnesses he might have in his manner by the liberal provision he had made for them.

At last the repast was over; and when the tea-things were cleared away the three sat round the cosy fire. It was just at this moment—just when Martha had forgotten all about Mr Jenkins, and Clarissa was much interested in remarks made by Mrs Moore with regard to her late husband—that a step, firm and yet hurried, was heard on the gravel outside. The new-comer stopped at the back-door, the latch was lifted, and Martha knew, even before he was announced by the triumphant Annie, that Thomas Jenkins had once more put in an appearance. Mrs Moore also knew it, and turned a rosy, almost a frightened, red. The only one quite calm and indifferent when the Australian entered the room was Clarissa Rodney.

'Here I am,' said Jenkins. 'I thought I would look round. Evening, Polly; glad to see you, old girl. Ah, how do you do, Martha?'

He kissed his sister, nodded fiercely to his niece, and then looked with surprise at Clarissa.

Now was Clarissa's opportunity. She had never looked better than she did at this moment as she rose, came a step forward, and said at once, 'I am so glad you have come, Mr Jenkins. I have been longing to hear something about Australia, something from one who has been there; and you have been in Queensland—have you not? I want to hear about the gold-mines. It is on account of father; he is working up a lecture on the subject.'

'Let me introduce you, Tom dear,' said Mrs Moore, looking with gratitude at Clarissa. 'This young lady's name is Miss Clarissa Rodney, and her father is a very distinguished Professor of University College, London. He lives at Upton, and gives lectures at several of the schools.—Miss Rodney, this is my brother, Mr Thomas Jenkins.'

Jenkins bowed awkwardly, his rough face crimsoned all over. After a moment's hesitation he held out his hand, saying briskly, 'I shall be glad, I'm sure, miss, to give you any information in my power.' Then he dropped into a chair by Clarissa's side. She took no notice of his rough manner, but began immediately to question him. At first her interest was more or less assumed; but it quickly became real. Jenkins was neither very rough nor uncouth when he lost his nervousness. He quickly lost it in the presence of this tactful girl. He gave her just the information she wanted.

'You must come and see my father,' she said at last. 'He is to give a course of lectures on gold-mines—the boring process, and the sifting, and all

the rest. Will you come when he is better, Mr Jenkins?'

'Delighted,' said Jenkins, 'that is, if I can tell a learned person like your father anything he wants to know; but I am a rough sort of man, one who has seen the seamy side—eh, Polly? No one knows better than you do about that.'

'Please, Martha,' said Clarissa suddenly, 'will you come over here and let us both ask your uncle questions?'

'I am afraid, miss,' said Jenkins, 'that move of yours won't work, for Martha don't care to talk to me. I can see that well enough, and she 's not going to deny it.'

Martha jumped up hastily; tears filled her eyes; she ran into the kitchen.

'He 's come back, miss,' said Annie, 'and I 'm that thankful. Why, Miss Martha, what is the matter?'

'I am going upstairs,' said Martha. 'Don't tell any one.'

'Going upstairs,' echoed Annie. 'Then that you ain't.' She ran forward, shut the kitchen door, locked it, and put the key in her pocket.

'Miss Martha,' she said, 'you ain't a-going to upset everything. If you had only seen the missus all this live-long day, a-fretting and a-thinking of you, and a-thinking of him, and torn between the love she has for you, her only child, and the love she has for him, you 'd go straight back again now, Miss Martha—and you will, won't you?'

'He doesn't like me,' cried Martha. 'It 's not my fault to-night, Annie. I would have been civil,

Clarissa showed me how; but, oh! he is nothing to her—he is not her uncle. She can see him just as little as she likes; but I—I must live with him.'

'Sit in this easy-chair, miss, and talk to me. You have got to bear with him; you have got to be content, and to find out the good in him, and to shut your eyes to the roughnesses. For my part, Miss Martha, I think him no end of a bounteous gentleman. I like him, miss; I do truly.'

'He is not your uncle,' said Martha. She did not know why she confided in Annie; but she could not help herself, for Annie was not only sympathetic but she was also determined, and her remarks were so full of sense that it was impossible to be angry with her.

'He ain't nothing to me compared to what he is to you, miss,' continued Annie. 'I'm right glad to be back again, and to serve the missus, for there never was a lady like her—never, and to serve you, miss, too; but I can get other places, because the missus will always give me a good word, and I can rise in my wages, and go on to be better and better, until I am parlour-maid in quite a big house, with, maybe, a footman to help me. But you, Miss Martha, it's all downhill with you if you don't accept what the good God has sent you; and if the gentleman is a bit rough, you have got to put up with it for your mother's sake.'

Meanwhile Clarissa, having finished her conversation, rose. 'I must go now,' she said.

'You cannot go back alone, dear,' said Mrs Moore.

'Mother promised to send a servant for me; but I am afraid she has forgotten. I don't mind at all going back by myself,' said Clarissa.

Jenkins gallantly holding an umbrella over the girl.

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'Nothing of the sort, miss,' said Jenkins. 'If you will accept my humble escort I shall be very pleased to walk into town with you.'

'You are more than kind,' replied the girl. 'I shall be very glad indeed if you will.' Clarissa now got up, kissed Mrs Moore, who asked her to come again, and then ran into the kitchen, where Martha, shame-faced and miserable, was seated in a sulky attitude near the fire. 'Oh, Martha!' she exclaimed, 'he is so good, and he has a heart of gold. I knew, somehow, that he had.'

Martha could not bring herself to reply. Clarissa put on her hat and jacket, and a moment later went out of the house with Jenkins. The man's face had beamed with pleasure while he was talking to Mrs Moore and Clarissa; but he frowned heavily as he passed through the kitchen, and would not even glance in Martha's direction.

Soon Clarissa and he were walking over the sloppy road towards town, Jenkins gallantly holding an umbrella over the girl.

'To tell you the truth, Miss Rodney,' he remarked, 'I am a bit sorry I ever came back. I might have sent help to my sister and stayed away myself; but there, I am only human after all.'

'Mrs Moore is so very glad to have you!' exclaimed Clarissa. 'You only need to look into her face to see that.'

'But there is another person who is not glad to have me,' replied Jenkins almost with a snarl, 'and that girl is the one, miss, I have thought most about —I'll be frank with you, miss, I can't get round your name—I never heard the like of it before. If

you were my niece I'd call you 'Rissy—yes, 'Rissy would be easy enough to say; but whatever you are called, I could manage with a girl like you. You would be kind to a man even though he was a bit rough; but she is not. She hates me. She doesn't care for all the good I could do her. She hates me.'

'I wish you wouldn't think so. I wish you wouldn't form such an opinion hastily,' Clarissa ventured to reply, and then she stopped. After a pause, she resumed, 'You don't know what a nice girl Martha really is.'

'Nice! I wish she was not quite so nice,' said the man.

'But she is good and brave; she has got just those qualities you must admire. She has had a very hard time, and has endured great poverty.'

'Much she minds that, selfish minx! She would rather have her mother—my poor, good-natured, kind-hearted Polly, the little sister I used to dote on—wanting the necessaries of life than she would sacrifice the smallest bit of her pride. I tell you what, miss, that is the sort of girl I can't abide. I wish your father and my sister could change daughters, and then all would be well.'

'But as that cannot be, Mr Jenkins, will you have patience with Martha, and just feel that it is a little difficult for her to fall at once into your ways.'

'Then you think me rough too?'

'I think you are very interesting and kind,' replied Clarissa, 'and I like you—yes, I like you very much; you must remember that your rough life in Australia has made you somewhat of a stranger to our English ways. But I can say honestly I like you for yourself.'

'That is right, miss. I never met a nicer, more pleasant young lady than you are. You're not too proud to be seen with me—are you?'

'Of course not. What a ridiculous idea!'

'Well, but the lass is; the lass don't want me. Now, I tell you what: I don't intend to spend my money unless I spend it easily and freely; and either the girl is willing to accept me as I am, and to live the life I mark out for her to live, or I go and leave the mother and the girl both to their fate. I'll have no half-measures. Here we are at your house, miss, and I am obliged to you for listening to me so patiently.'

'I am quite sure things will come right in the end,' said Clarissa. 'I will have a talk with Martha.'

'It might do good if you would. Thank you heartily.'

'You won't forget to come and see my father, Mr Jenkins? I am certain what you have to say about the gold-mines would interest him greatly. Will you come next week?'

'Any day you like to name, Miss Rodney; and I am much obliged to you.'

Jenkins turned on his heel, grunting with secret satisfaction.

CHAPTER XVII.

'"YES" OR "NO" TO-NIGHT.'

HE stood still for a little on the wet road after he left Clarissa. He was thinking hard. Suddenly, with a significant whistle, he turned on his heel and retraced his steps to Freeman's Cottages.

Mrs Moore had not expected to see him again that night; and Martha, pale and with traces of tears round her eyes, was talking gently to her mother when they heard that crunch on the gravel—that heavy, quick, manly step—the latch of the kitchen door was rattled, for Annie had drawn the bolt preparatory to going to bed; and Jenkins was again in their midst.

'I want to say a word to your mistress, Annie; but you need not sit up, my girl. Go to bed, and sweet dreams to you. Here's a trifle for you,' said Jenkins, slipping a crown-piece into the willing girl's palm.

Annie felt so excited about the mine of wealth which seemed suddenly to have opened for her that she scarcely knew what she was doing; and before she had time to recover from her astonishment, Jenkins had vanished into the parlour.

'Here I am,' he exclaimed. 'I know I am not

welcome. Stay where you are, Martha.' He turned as he addressed this fierce remark to his niece. 'Stay where you are. It rests with you whether I come here as a welcome and honoured friend and patron and benefactor, and all the rest, or whether you and your poor mother never see my face again. It rests with you. Things have come to a pretty pass when a girl flouts her own flesh and blood.'

'Oh, I don't!' Martha replied.

'I say you do. You have the same blood in your veins—yes, though I am only step-brother to your mother—you have. You have it on the grandfather's side, and you can't get out of it, however hard you may try; and now you have got to listen to a plain truth. —Don't turn so white, Polly. It's much better to have this out, and you'll sleep easier when all is said and done.'

'But I have been talking to Martha, and she'——began Mrs Moore; but her gentle voice was scarcely heard in the hubbub raised by Jenkins's strident tones.

'I have come here,' he said, 'to make a plain proposal. It can be accepted by you two, or declined by you two. It is "yes" or "no;" and it is "yes" or "no" to-night.'

'Well, sit down anyhow, Tom,' said Mrs Moore.

Martha rose and motioned him to a chair by the fire.

'Keep your seat,' said Jenkins; 'I am in no humour to sit. I'm bitter hurt—yes, that's what I am, bitter hurt—and I never thought, not for a single moment, that the little girl named after my mother—the best woman that ever breathed in the whole of God's earth —would be the one to plant a sword in me. But there,

it 's done, and no amount of undoing will ever put it right again. All the same, I don't bear no malice—that is, if things are made clear and square in the future. So now, you two, Polly and Martha, have got to listen to me, Thomas Jenkins.'

'I do wish you would sit, Tom,' came Mrs Moore's plaintive voice again.

'Oh, let me be, Polly. Can't you see when a man 's roused he must have some vent for his emotions. If I stamp up and down your parlour it will be Martha, here, you have to blame for it. But now, then, to terms. I find you, Polly, in extreme poverty. You are living in a house a great deal too small for you.'

'It is not,' said Martha at that moment.

'I 'll thank you to hear me out, miss; you must not interrupt. Your turn to speak will come presently.—I say, Polly, you are living in a house that is not fit for my sister; and if you care to make terms you won't be here long. The house is too small, and the ways of the house are too mean; the food is not the right sort, nor the servant the kind that ought to wait upon you. I am willing to change everything. I am more than willing—anxious—to take a big house in any part of the country you two like best. I am willing to furnish it according to your notions. My ideas are heavy and solid; gilt and crimson, and carpets with good decided patterns, and curtains of rep, and antimacassars and wool mats. My mother adored wool mats. That 's my idea; but I am not proud, I am not wayward, and I 'll give in. I 'll furnish so as to please that young miss there, and I 'll get in servants as many as you, Polly, think desirable. I 'll pay the piper. I 'll pay for all the food and all the house-rent,

and what the furniture costs, and the wages of the servants; and you, Polly, can keep your pittance for pocket-money. As to Martha there, she can get the very best education her heart desires, and she can pick and choose her friends, and she can come in and out just as she likes. She is welcome to any amusement she fancies, horses and all the rest; and she can buy just the dresses that please her, and I will give her what pocket-money a young lady ought to have. She shall help me to entertain my visitors; and you, Polly, looking elegant as a picture, shall sit at the head of my table. I am not thinking of getting married, or any nonsense of that sort; I am thinking of having a home for my little Polly, and a home for the girl called after my mother. I will set to work on the matter the moment you, Polly, and you, Martha, say the word. I won't cast up bygones to you, Miss Patty—no, that I won't. I have a broad mind, although I am rough. All you two have to do is to say, "We will accept the goods you bring us, and we will"—well, Polly, you at least will—"love you;" and the girl—the lass—will keep a civil tongue in her head. The only thing I require is a civil tongue from the lass, and the acknowledgment that I am master.'

Martha moved restlessly when Jenkins uttered the last sentence. The colour had come into her cheeks, and her gray eyes were very bright. Tears were not far off. Another moment and she would have broken down, rushed forward, and flung herself into her uncle's arms; but his last words, and the fierce, defiant tone in which he uttered them, pulled her up short.

'Yes,' he said, 'that is the rub—I am master. You have to acknowledge that you owe it all to me; both

of you have to feel it down deep in your hearts. I will not be hard, and I will not be nasty; but I am to be master, girl, just as your father would be. When you marry, if you marry to please me, you shall have a tidy fortune to take to your husband. Until then, you do what I wish. You need not think I 'll be hard; but I shall be master. I am always present when your friends come—that is, when I wish to be present; and I always take the foot of the table. In short, the house is mine, and you live with me, you put up with me, you bear with me. It is worth your while. That is my proposal.'

He paused for an instant. Martha made an effort to speak, but her mother held up a warning finger.

'Don't talk in a hurry,' said Jenkins. 'That is one side. Now I will tell you the other.'

Thomas Jenkins by this time had worked off some of the steam, as he expressed it. He had been pacing the room fiercely while he was talking. Now he stood still, thrust his hands deeply into his trousers pockets, lowered his brows, and looked straight ahead.

'I see a picture,' he began; 'it is a wonderful picture, and very vivid. It is of a little girl, a pretty little tot; her name is Polly. She is neglected a bit, poor little mite, and runs to a lad, a rough lad with red hair; and he takes her in his arms and cossets her. The little 'un likes it, and strokes his face; and the lad lets out to the little 'un that he is lonely, that he has no one to pet him, and that he likes her to do it. Then the little 'un falls asleep in his arms. That 's one bit of the picture. Again I see that same picture, but altered. The little 'un is a girl, slim and tall and pretty—very pretty and very genteel-looking. The lad is big too,

and very rough—an ugly youth, with uncouth features, wide mouth, freckles on his face, and red hair to crown his poll; but the girl is fond of him, and sees no ugliness in him, and they talk—oh, how they talk! They sit in a corner—the great, rough overgrown lad, the hulk of a boy and the nice little slender lass; and the lass says, "Tell me more about your mother, Tom," and Tom's heart swells within him as he talks of his mother. Ay, she was a good woman; she was a woman who never thought anything too small for her to notice. She was a woman as kind as could be, gentle and loving and faithful; she was the mother of the boy, and the boy he just worshipped her. She had no fine-lady airs and no beauty to boast of; but she had a big mother-heart, and that seems to me to be the best thing in all the wide world for a woman to have. The mother was in her grave, and the lad had fretted ever since; and it was only when talking to his little sister that he got any comfort out of life. She loved him, and she liked him to talk of his mother. That's another bit of the picture.

'Now I see another picture. The lad is away from home, in a strange land; he is with the gold-diggers, and the life is rough as rough can be. He has worked hard all day, and got only cuffs for his trouble. He goes out of the way of his comrades—he is a young man now, and ugly at that—and takes a letter out of his pocket and reads it. The letter is from his little sister. It is the next best thing to being with her; and the letter tells him that the little sister is married, and has a husband and a baby of her own, and that she has called the baby Martha, after his mother. Nobody knows what that means to the lad; he is

almost crazy with delight and with love for his little sister, and he takes a great vow under the silent heavens and the twinkling stars that he will give up his life to his sister, and work for her and the baby called after his mother.

'Well,' continued Jenkins, 'he has kept that vow; he has worked for the sister and the baby. He never wrote, thinking it better not. It was queer perhaps; but it was his way. He had piled up gold on gold until his fortune was big and deep and high; and when his pile was made he sold his shares of the mine and came back to England, and found his sister Polly. Yes, Polly, I found you,' continued Jenkins, 'much the same as usual, with the same tender heart and the same love for me; but you were down in the world, my girl—down in the world. You told me again that you had called your child after my mother, and I blessed you. Then the girl herself came on the scene.'

Here Jenkins broke off abruptly. After a pause he resumed the narrative.

'I'll say nothing more about that. We all know what happened then. Well, I have made my offer, and you can refuse it; but before you do refuse, listen to what I say. There is that in me, Thomas Jenkins, which will go *out*. My heart is big enough, although it is rough, and there is a fire in it; but that fire can be put out. Once it is out, why, I turn tail. You, Polly, must choose either the girl you have brought into the world, or me. If you give the girl up, and have nothing more to do with her, you shall come with me, little sister, and I will tend you to the end; but if you don't give the girl up, why, you stick to her and you do without me. You are just as you were

before. I take it that's what you two will choose, only I'd like to know to-night. I'll go away—God knows where—it don't matter; but you'll never be troubled with me, either of you, again. I want you both to choose to-night. Now, Polly, you speak first.'

Here Jenkins dropped into a chair. He was leaning half across the little table, and his eyes, burning like two live coals, were fixed on his sister's face.

'Is it me, or is it Martha, Polly lass? Is it your big rough brother, or is it your girl—which? Don't look at her, don't consult with her; answer my question: which shall it be? I'll ask the lass herself to answer her own question later.'

Mrs Moore's face was death-like.

'I love you, Tom,' she said. 'I'd be glad to go with you, and to cast in my lot with you; but, Tom, I don't love you as well as the child. If the child does not agree, Tom, I must stay with her. I cannot help it.' Mrs Moore burst into tears, and covered her face with her hands.

Martha rose quickly and threw her arms round her mother's neck, and the mother laid her head on the daughter's breast.

'Mother,' said the girl, 'you were always unselfish; now I will be unselfish too. If Uncle Tom will take me as I am, he will never again have cause to complain. If I feel dissatisfied, he will never know.—I will do my utmost, Uncle Tom, to be a good niece to you. Will you kiss me now, Uncle Tom?' continued Martha. 'Will you give me the kiss I refused yesterday?'

'You are enough to puzzle a man,' said Thomas Jenkins after a pause. 'I never thought you would

yield like this. Well, it's all right. We 'll see about a house at once.' He went up to Martha, put his arm round her waist, drew her close to him, and kissed her in a fierce, passionate way; then, leaving her, he bent over Polly.

'I'm right glad that I won't lose you, little sister,' he exclaimed.

'I have yielded,' thought Martha. 'He doesn't love me. He would have loved me if I had acted differently yesterday. It is dreadful to have to yield to a man like him when he does not even love you; but I have done it. I hope I have done right.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROWN-PAPER PARCELS.

EARLY next morning Thomas Jenkins went to London. His note to his sister briefly stated that he would return in time for supper, and that he had gone to town on business. He travelled third-class. Jenkins looked just what he was—a rough and very homely personage. He was dressed in the clothes he had worn in Australia; they were of homespun tweed, and were badly made, the trousers baggy and the coat ill-fitting. During the journey to town he was in a brown study, and took no notice of any of his fellow-travellers; on arrival at Paddington he hired a four-wheeler and drove at once to a post-office, where he asked for the London Directory. When this was handed to him he began a search. He was looking for the address of a fashionable tailor.

'I don't know anything about a proper fit-out,' he mused; 'I couldn't tell from Adam whether a coat was a good cut or a bad one. How am I to manage?'

He entered the names and addresses of a number of tailors in his note-book, and presently he strolled into a hotel, and ordered lunch. While partaking of this the idea suddenly occurred that he might confide in

the waiter, a stylish young man, tall and well-dressed, and with irreproachable manners.

'I say,' cried Tom Jenkins, 'a word with you.' As he spoke he slipped a half-crown into the waiter's hand. Jenkins's idea of getting through life was to pave the way on all possible occasions, if not with gold at least with silver. 'Look you here,' he repeated, 'I don't want any one to listen. This room isn't half-full at the present moment. I want to have a bit of conversation with you.'

'Of course, sir,' answered the waiter in surprise. 'What can I do for you, sir?'

'I'm a rough party,' continued Jenkins; 'but I am solid.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the waiter, with a twinkle in his eyes.

'I am solid in more senses than one,' replied Jenkins. 'I am solid in the purse-line. Now, you understand?'

The waiter's tone became very respectful. 'I think I understand, sir,' he answered.

'I want a swell rig-out—you understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I want to spend my money so that the young girls I meet—my nieces and others—shall say of me, "There's a gentleman; there's a man of position; there's a man worth knowing." That's what I want. Now, who will do the needful? That's what I have to ask you. Who is the best barber to go to? Who is the best tailor? You must have many gentlemen come in here, and you must know something about tailors.'

'Oh yes, sir,' replied the waiter. 'There is a first-rate establishment in Conduit Street.'

'Where 's Conduit Street?' asked Thomas Jenkins.

The waiter described the locality of Conduit Street. Jenkins thanked him. He was next told where to get his hair cut in the most approved style; then he started off intent on business.

Arrived at the shop in Conduit Street, Jenkins immediately announced that he wished to be rigged out like a gentleman, and asked for an interview with the head-tailor. One of the principals, believing that money was to be made out of this uncouth individual, came forward, and Jenkins asked his advice.

Mr Burdett assured Mr Jenkins that he could not do better than put himself absolutely into the hands of his house. 'We will make you several suits in the most fashionable styles,' he said.

'That is right; that is just what I want,' replied Jenkins, rubbing his hands gleefully. 'This sort of rig isn't the go—is it?'

'No, sir,' answered Mr Burdett. He enumerated various suits Mr Jenkins would require for different occasions; and finally large orders were given. Before leaving, Jenkins was adorned in a ready-made suit, which—though it was not a perfect fit—was much better and more suitable than the suit he had just discarded. He left the tailor's establishment fully satisfied that the change in his outward appearance had raised him quite ten inches in the social scale. He then went to a hairdresser's for further renovations. Finally he surveyed his face and figure in a large mirror, and was convinced that there was not a more presentable man than Thomas Jenkins to be found in the City of London. 'The lass won't

scorn me now,' he said to himself. 'I don't mind what Polly thinks. I'd like to sit in the old suit and talk to Polly by the hour; but I can't abear the scorn in the eye of that lass. She shall soon change her tune, that she shall.' He then hurried off to make several purchases.

Though Jenkins had gone up to London third-class he returned first, bringing many packages—square parcels and bulky parcels of all sorts and sizes with him. He arrived at Upton by the nine o'clock train, and drove straight to Freeman's Cottages. He was too much of a fine gentleman to condescend to carry his own parcels now, so he shouted to a boy to hold the horse, and the cabby followed him along the gravel-path, and they both stopped outside the back-door. Neither would Jenkins condescend to raise the latch; he knocked, and Annie, in some astonishment, opened the door wide.

Mrs Moore and Martha were expecting him, and a nice supper had been prepared. Martha, quietly dressed and with a sad expression of face, was doing her utmost to reconcile herself to the new conditions. She had been thinking all day of the advantages which would accrue to her in the education her uncle had promised; and she also had very definite ideas with regard to helping Clarissa Rodney out of her dilemma. Uncle Tom should not be their benefactor only; he should be Clarissa's also. She started when his knock was heard at the door.

'That cannot be Uncle Tom,' remarked Mrs Moore; 'he would lift the latch and come in. It wouldn't be a bit like him to knock in that fashion.'

When Annie opened the door she started back.

'No, sir, my mistress cannot see any one to-night,' she cried.—'Oh, lor'! Mr Jenkins, you'll forgive me, sir; but I didn't know you.'

'Stand back, my girl, and let the man in with the parcels,' said Jenkins. He strode majestically into the kitchen, and relieved the cabman of the packages.

Martha stood in amazement at the parlour door. She really did not recognise Uncle Tom when he went up to her, and said in a stilted way, 'Here I am, Martha. Good evening.' He shook hands but did not kiss her; then he went into the parlour where Mrs Moore was waiting for him.

'I'm done up a bit, Polly,' he said. 'Neither you nor Martha will have cause to be ashamed of the brother and uncle from Australia. How do you like my new suit, Polly—eh? It's very genteel—isn't it?'

'Oh, it is a very nice suit indeed, Tom,' replied Mrs Moore.

Martha struggled to repress a laugh. She secretly thought that Uncle Tom was not improved by his West End clothes; and she almost felt that she liked him best in his rough colonial outfit. Nevertheless, his own joy was excessive, and his face beamed.

'There won't be a finer gentleman than me in the length and breadth of England when a month or two have gone by,' Jenkins continued. 'Now we must hurry over the meal, for there are parcels to be opened.'

'Parcels?' queried Mrs Moore.

'Yes. I have got something for you, and something for the lass, and a trifle for the little maid-of-all-work. I like that little maid. We'll be house-hunting to-morrow; and I mean to get the furniture from one of

the grandest shops in London. I'm rich. You don't realise, either of you, that I am more than just well-off. I am rich, downright rich. I can do every single thing you desire, and I'm here to do it; that's my sole object in life. Now then, help away, Martha. Those eggs look very nice. Yes, I'll have a cup of tea, please. Sugar, did you say?—three lumps, please, and let them be large. No, I'm not at all tired; but I have had a very busy day. It's exciting work spending money in the way you had meant to spend it while you were piling it up. I have had a pleasant day—very pleasant.'

At supper Jenkins talked loudly of his day's adventures; in particular he apostrophised the waiter at the hotel, and said it was his intention to send that individual a five-pound note before a week was out.

Martha's amazement grew greater moment by moment; she tried, however, not to show too much excitement, but even she was not proof against the fascination of the parcels.

The tea-things were cleared away, the red cloth placed on the little table, and Annie was desired to bring in the packages.

'I'd have liked just to bundle them up under my arm and sweep them in myself,' said Tom; 'but I mustn't. I'm a different man now; I am in a different position. I am a gentleman now; and the proper English gentleman don't do nothing for himself. It will be very slow work doing nothing for the rest of my days—I who have done everything, from cooking a chop to building a house; but I'll do it to please you, Martha and Polly.'

'But, really, Uncle Tom,' began Martha, 'I don't

imagine—I don't think an English gentleman is quite of that opinion.'

'Oh, come, stop that,' said Uncle Tom. 'I have learned my lesson, and I am going through with it. I 'll be a fine gentleman, fine enough to please you, my lass, all the rest of my life.'

Annie, trembling with excitement, appeared with the parcels, which were laid on the table and opened one after the other by Martha. The contents of those parcels were enough to amaze any one who had not discovered the secret workings of Uncle Tom's kind heart, for he had certainly not failed to spend money freely during his day in town. Mrs Moore was supplied with a rose-coloured silk dress—many yards of rose-coloured silk.

'Because you fancied that colour—don't you remember, Polly?—when you were a little 'un. "Dress me like the roses," was your cry, my pretty dove. So here 's a silk dress the colour of the roses, and it shall be trimmed with white lace, and you shall wear it when you get up in the morning and all day long. You 'll look sweet in it, Polly, to my way of thinking.'

Poor Mrs Moore, who was still wearing black for her husband, quite shuddered at the thought of appearing in rose-coloured silk. There was nothing for it, however, but to accept, with apparent heartiness, the garment intended for her.

'It is kind of you, Tom,' she said. 'How sweet of you to remember my early fancies.'

'Ay, ay. I'm sweet, am I?' answered Tom. 'I thought I was, or that I 'd be getting so. Now then, that 's one of your presents. There 's more to follow—plenty more; but now it 's Martha's turn. My

little girl, I have had dreams about you in the bush. Many and many a time when I have lain on the bare ground looking up at the twinkling stars, I have thought of little Martha at home, and my picture of you was always to see you in sky-blue. So here's a sky-blue silk for you—plenty of it; and you shall trim it any way you fancy. When it is worn out you shall get another, and when that is worn out you shall have yet another. The mother in rose-colour, the daughter in sky-blue. That is the realisation of a dream.'

Martha, whose complexion was very sallow, and who knew that of all colours under the sun sky-blue would suit her least, felt nearly as confused as her mother. Thomas Jenkins, however, was so much elated by his own ideas of the realisation of his dreams that he did not observe the cloud which fell upon the spirits of both ladies.

But Annie, who stood in the background, and whom no power on earth could have forced into the kitchen, made up for any lack of demonstration by her own rapturous expressions of delight.

'Well, never in all my born days did I see anything more lovely. Oh, Mr Jenkins, you are a bounteous gentleman, sir! It's too good to believe that you has come home and a fortune in your hand.'

'That's it, Annie,' said Jenkins, who felt in his heart that he ought to have told the little maid-of-all-work to keep her place; but in reality he found her so absolutely in sympathy with him that he would not have removed her from the scene for worlds.

'Here's your parcel, Annie, and I hope you will like it.'

This parcel was the sort which would have been given to a poor girl in the days when Jenkins was young. He remembered that his mother had always tried to clothe the poor in a dingy sort of brown wincey; and Annie, who at least expected a gay cashmere for herself, felt a little crestfallen as brown wincey of a shade inclining to yellow, and some crimson flannel and coarse calico, tumbled out of her parcel.

'There you are,' said Jenkins; 'you 'll be warm now —eh? You won't have to go to your mother for any clothes for a good bit.'

'Oh no, sir,' answered Annie; 'and they 're very suitable, sir.'

'I hope so, my girl. I hope everything is suitable that I have brought home to-night.'

The other parcels contained more presents of another kind, equally correct and proper. There was a case with some bottles of rare old port, to put colour into Mrs Moore's cheeks, as her brother expressed it; and, in addition, there was a workbox for Mrs Moore of a most elaborate design, and a writing-case with silver clasps for Martha; and next, there was a square box full of reels of cotton and packets of needles and cases of pins, and other useful articles, such as scissors and thimble, for Annie.

'I mustn't put her out of her place,' whispered Jenkins to his sister. 'I remember the sort of things my mother gave to the poor.'

There was one packet, however, which remained unopened.

'What is that, Uncle Tom?' asked Martha.

'It is for the pretty girl you brought here with you,'

replied Thomas Jenkins; 'it contains books she may fancy. I thought I would give them to her. She is a very nice girl, and she took my fancy. She's what I call a genteel sort of girl; she has no nonsense about her. I like her well. It would have suited me to have brought her a check silk dress, and I thought of doing so; but I wasn't sure what pattern would take her fancy. I'll give her one some day, however. I'm nuts on that girl; I like her uncommonly well. She shall be your guest whenever you like, Patty. But now, my dears—my dear sister Polly and my niece Patty—let's turn to business. We go house-hunting in the morning.—You can leave us, Annie. You can measure your wincey dress, and your red flannel, and your calico, and make all your own garments, for you have got the materials handy. Now quit the room, my girl; quit the room.'

CHAPTER XIX.

JENKINS MANOR.

GREAT changes occurred during the next fortnight; and, sad to relate, Martha began to neglect her studies at the day-school. She was even somewhat absent-minded when Clarissa referred to her perplexities.

'I don't know what to do,' Clarissa explained. 'I am sometimes nearly mad with trouble. Father's friend, Mr Sarson, is coming in less than a week, and Sir John Carbery will visit father a few days later. The month is rapidly coming to an end, and of course Sir John will expect to be paid. But the most awful thing of all is this, Martha: father has got it into his head that Mr Sarson has paid the doctor's fee, and he is quite certain to say something to Mr Sarson. Mr Sarson will naturally deny all knowledge of it, and then father will begin to suspect.'

'Why shouldn't he suspect?' inquired Martha boldly. 'You did a very fine, brave thing, Clarissa. Why should you be ashamed of it?'

'It is the sort of thing father would never forgive,' said Clarissa gloomily.

Martha was silent. She had not forgotten her friend, but had not yet found out a way to help her.

'Why don't you speak?' Clarissa asked. 'Is that enormously rich uncle of yours putting all your friends out of your head? Don't you sympathise with me?'

'Why do you ask such a question?' cried Martha fiercely. 'I do sympathise with you. I always think of you, Clarissa. When will the month be up?'

'This is the 10th of November,' replied Clarissa; 'the time when I ought to pay Sir John Carbery is the 20th.'

'Ten days!' Martha said softly. 'That is a long time.'

'Not when you have no hope of success in the end,' said Clarissa. 'What shall I do? That awful, awful scholarship! Oh, how I hate the thought of the lessons I must take, and the work I must do, instead of having the money in my hand. I never loved money specially; but at the present moment I adore it.'

Martha was silent again, and the girls walked slowly side by side. Presently they reached Clarissa's hall door.

'Father is getting better,' said Clarissa. 'After all, I have saved his life; that is a blessing. Whatever happens, his dear life is saved, and he is with us still. Even if he should never speak to me again, he will be in the land of the living; that is the greatest comfort I have.'

'Come in, Clare; come in, mother wants you,' shouted little Janet. Flinging the hall door open, she rushed down the steps and across the road.

Just then a burly individual was seen walking across the street; he quickened his pace at sight of the three girls. It was Mr Thomas Jenkins, now attired in what he considered the latest style. It was the middle of the day of a work-a-day world; and Thomas Jenkins, disregarding the advice of his tailor, who told him that for a gentleman of leisure there was nothing more suitable at this hour than a rough tweed suit very well made, was in a frock-coat of the most approved pattern and latest fashion. He wore as a button-hole a choice camellia, had on an expensive waistcoat of a very flowery design, and a broad-check tie. His diamond studs were of the purest water, and he had a diamond pin in his tie and a flashing diamond ring on the little finger of his left hand. As he approached the girls he took off both gloves and straightened himself up to his full height.

Thomas Jenkins might have been going to his own wedding, so smart was his attire. He stopped in front of the girls, lifted his hat, and bowed graciously. 'I trust I see my friend Miss Clarissa in good health?' he said.

'Thank you, Mr Jenkins, I am quite well,' replied Clarissa.

Janet, who was clinging to her sister's arm, looked up with her dancing blue eyes at the stranger.

'Who may this dear little maid be?' asked Jenkins, who, notwithstanding his grand garments, could not prevent the milk of human kindness with which Nature had so richly endowed him coming out on all occasions.

'This is my little sister,' said Clarissa.—'Janet, this is Mr Thomas Jenkins, of whom I told you.'

'The man who has come from the Anticlimax?' inquired Janet, looking up in wonder.

Clarissa laughed. 'Antipodes you mean, you silly little puss!'

'Yes, yes. It's all the same. It does seem so funny,' said Janet, 'that people at that side have their toes against our toes, and their heads down in the air.' She laughed merrily.

'Mr Jenkins,' said Clarissa in an earnest voice, 'I did not thank you sufficiently for the books you sent me. It was most kind of you—most kind.'

'I hope you liked them,' said Jenkins. 'I asked the man in the shop what books would be suitable for a nice young girl of your age, and he said love stories. So I asked him to give me the most exciting love stories he had, with thrill and go in them. I hope you liked them. I chose four.'

'I have not read them yet. When I do, I shall doubtless enjoy them,' said Clarissa, colouring slightly.

'You know, Clare,' Janet now whispered, 'mother said you were not to read any of them; that they were not fit for you. She locked them up in the bookcase in the drawing-room.'

'Oh, hush!' said Clarissa.

But Jenkins had heard the words.

'Not fit—eh?' he said; 'not fit for you to read, Miss Clarissa? But I asked the shopman what books would be most suitable for a young slip of a girl with bright eyes and a taking manner, and he said love stories. I'll never go back to that shop again as long as I live. What do you like, Miss Clarissa? What can I send you?'

'Nothing, nothing at present, Mr Jenkins,' answered the girl. 'You have been most kind to think of me at all; and I dare say the books are nice enough, but mother has an idea that I had better not read that sort of book at present.'

'It's very puzzling,' said Jenkins. 'I try to do right; but I seem to put my foot in it.'

'When are you coming to see my father?' asked Clarissa in her gentlest tones. 'I have been telling him about you. He would enjoy a visit.'

'I am very much pressed with work just at present; but I'll come next week, Miss Clarissa, if I may.' Then Jenkins touched his niece on the arm. 'You're wanted at the house, Patty. There's a great deal to consult about.—By your leave, young ladies, I must hurry off with my own lass now; she's wanted at the new house.'

Clarissa and Janet went slowly into the house. Clarissa's burden lay heavy at her heart. Janet looked at her inquiringly.

'Mother says that she is going to open the missionary-box on Sunday week,' the little girl remarked. 'She has had a very urgent letter from the missionary at Sierra Leone, and she means to send him our subscriptions without waiting for the New Year. Do you know, Clare, that mother has an account of the exact amount in the box. She will miss the sovereign you took.'

'Oh, it's distracting!' said Clarissa. 'Don't say any more now, Janey; my head is aching as if it would split.'

Meanwhile Martha and her uncle walked down the High Street.

'What do you think of my turn-out—eh, Martha?' he asked.

'I'd like you better, uncle, in your tweed suit—that very nice dark gray the tailor sent last week.'

'Better! But it ain't nearly so fine as this. I might just as well be back in Australia. I always wore that kind there.'

'But the cut is not the same, Uncle Tom, and the cut makes all the difference.'

'You don't say so. Seems to me you have very fine ideas. Well, hurry up, can't you? A lot of furniture has arrived to-day. We'll all be settled in the house before a week is out. But I wish I knew what that young girl would like.'

'You mean Clarissa?'

'Yes. I put my foot in it about the books. That shopman shall have a blowing-up from me when next I visit town. I must give her something else.'

'You might give her a'—— began Martha, and then stopped.

'A what? There's one thing I dislike about you, Martha Moore: you are not out with all your thoughts. Frankness is the only sort of metal that will go down with Thomas Jenkins, frankness to any extent. What might I give her? You are supposed to know the ways of girls; but there, I won't consult you. Sometimes you annoy me very much. I expect you are the very image of that man your mother married.'

'You must not abuse my father, Uncle Tom.'

'Oh, there you are, hoity-toity! Always rubbing me the wrong way. But come, we'll forget our troubles in looking at the new furniture.'

Jenkins had taken a house with newly laid-out

grounds in the suburbs of the town. It was a square red-brick house, glaring in colour outside, but with spacious and commodious rooms within. There were several sitting-rooms on the ground-floor, and a very wide entrance-hall and handsome staircase. It was just the sort of house, as he said to his sister, he had pictured in his dreams.

'I have but to shut my eyes and see the whole thing,' he said. 'I see the furniture and I see the house just as I always dreamt it; you, in your rose-coloured silk, looking like a dream yourself; and the house furnished well, as my mother would like to see it.'

Now the late Mrs Jenkins, although one of the worthiest of women and the guardian angel of her son Thomas's life, was not remarkable for her æsthetic taste; and Thomas Jenkins, whatever he did for his sister and niece, was determined—to the best of his ability—to please the spirit of his dead mother.

'For all I can tell, she may be looking on,' he meditated. 'I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world. She had her tastes, and her tastes were very good. None of your sickly greens for her, none of your apple tints for her; everything plain and straightforward and solid and handsome. Handsome was her word. "I like handsome furniture," she used to say; and handsome shall be the furniture her son Thomas brings into the new house.'

So, although Martha pleaded, and Mrs Moore gently ventured to suggest, the furniture was of the kind which might be designated old-fashioned and solid. Only one room would he deliver over to Martha's individual taste.

'You shall have your private sitting-room,' he answered, 'and into that room I will never step. You can furnish it just as you please. Make it sickly, make it dark, make it dull, fill it with all those things which delight the modern woman; but don't ask me to sit in it with you.'

'Oh, you are kind, uncle,' said poor Martha.

'You shall come to town with me, and go to any shops you fancy, and give your own orders for your own room,' continued Jenkins, 'and I'll pay the bills. The bills can be sent to me. But the rest of the house is my house, and it shall be furnished as my mother would wish if she were here in the flesh. There is not a modern woman to hold a candle to my mother, and the house shall be furnished in her taste, and in no other taste under the sun.'

So the house was furnished according to the ideas of the dead and gone Mrs Jenkins. Now this taste, according to Martha, was truly barbarous. Jenkins had a vivid recollection of his mother, who died when he was a little boy. She had liked mahogany; therefore oak was not allowed in the dining-room, which was furnished in very handsome mahogany with a high polish. The carpet was quite suitable, being a heavy and rich Turkey; but the pictures were oleographs, and were loud in colour and vulgar in their heavy gilt frames. The curtains of crimson rep looked well enough. The wall paper was what is called 'flock;' it had been difficult to get 'flock,' but Jenkins at last worrited a sufficient quantity to cover his walls out of an old-fashioned shop. The paper was crimson, to match the curtains. Everything in the room was in a similar style. There was a certain

solidity and old-fashioned grace about it, however; and Martha and her mother had to admit that the dining-room was quite tolerable.

The hall was decorated with a good deal of white marble, and statues not in the best taste peeped here and there through green foliage; Jenkins had given orders *carte-blanche* to a neighbouring florist to supply the house with plants and flowers.

The drawing-room, however, was really the sore point, for here Jenkins, whose own taste was quite uncultivated, allowed himself full swing. Here reposed the most garish carpet to be found in the length and breadth of England. The curtains were of royal-blue, with white lace curtains peeping from beneath their loudly-coloured folds. Jenkins was most particular about the white lace curtains; they were to be of the kind that would wash—that could be taken down at intervals and put into the wash-tub. 'That's the sort my mother always used,' he said. The room was otherwise furnished in keeping with the loud carpet and the royal-blue curtains. The walls were covered with white paper embossed in gilt. There were several large mirrors, and what was called a marble console-table was placed at one end of the room; this had a heavy gilt mirror above. There was a table in the centre, with a royal-blue cover, and on this Jenkins insisted on placing volumes in handsome bindings and photograph albums.

Mrs Moore groaned when she saw the centre table. 'It is not the fashion now,' she protested.

'What do I care for the fashion?' he answered. 'It is what my mother would have preferred;' and in the centre of the drawing-room the table remained. There

were other tables here and there, on which reposed wax-flowers and stuffed birds in cases. Over the mantelpiece was a large mirror in a heavy gilt frame.

Jenkins was immensely proud of the drawing-room. 'It is not a room,' he said, 'to sit in so much as to admire.'

'To sit in that room,' Martha said to her mother, 'would turn me ill; but, thank goodness! he has given me a private sitting-room.' She had fitted up this room according to her own taste, and it was simple, bright, and yet refreshing to the eye. She chose one or two good pictures, of which Jenkins could make nothing.

'Take them away,' he said. 'I don't understand 'em. I don't care for that sickly-looking female.' Here he alluded to one of Burne-Jones's most lovely figures. 'It is not my style. I mean to go to the Academy next year; and if I can pick up anything bright and cheerful I'll get it for the house; but nothing of that sort for me. It is going to be a remarkably handsome house—the sort of house my mother would have loved to live in.'

The other apartments were furnished and decorated in accordance with the design of the drawing-room; and poor Martha realised that riches certainly brought with them a considerable amount of discomfort.

At last everything was completed according to the wishes of Mr Jenkins. He worked hard, and worried around, and rushed backwards and forwards to London, spending money, as he naïvely expressed it, in shovelfuls. Then the servants were engaged. Having discovered the generosity of the master—they had got wind of what was going on from the loquacious

Annie—a very large number applied for engagement. Six or eight servants at least were selected, and also a valet.

'It is proper that a gentleman in my position should have a valet,' Jenkins remarked to Mrs Moore. 'I asked the waiter at the hotel in town. He is a good friend to me is that waiter. I said, "Do you think I ought to be valeted?" and he said, "Yes, you ought." He told me of a young man likely to suit, and I have engaged him. You, Polly, are to have a lady's-maid.'

'I really have no use for a maid,' replied Mrs Moore. 'I dislike immensely any one fussing around me.'

'I am afraid you must bear it,' he answered. 'You and Martha must have a maid between you. I don't want either of you to do one scrap of work. I have engaged a woman from town for you both; and she and the valet will, I expect, put us three through our paces.'

'Oh dear!' sighed poor Martha, 'what an awful life I am to lead in future. I really think I prefer the old days.' But she kept these thoughts to herself, and endeavoured to take comfort in her mother's evident joy and excitement.

'Your uncle will settle down, my dear, when he gets into his new house,' the widow said soothingly; 'and we must manage him. He has the kindest heart in the world. It is just a matter of management.'

'My grandmother's influence worries me dreadfully,' replied Martha. 'That everything should be conducted according to the views of an old woman who has been dead for over forty years is almost past enduring.'

'Oh, we'll manage him when the time comes,' said

Mrs Moore. 'After all, Martha, you have got a sweet sitting-room of your own.'

'In which I shall be forced to spend most of my time,' answered Martha; 'and you, mother darling, shall always have your corner near the window. I ordered a special armchair for you, a very comfortable one.'

At last the day arrived when the Moores and Uncle Tom were to enter the new house. After serious deliberation it was called 'Jenkins Manor.' Uncle Tom's first idea was to call it 'Martha Mansion;' but when Martha declined to go to the new house if he gave it that name, he decided on adopting his mother's surname.

Accordingly, to Jenkins Manor they went. They were received by a row of servants standing in the hall; and amongst them the new valet, a rather objectionable-looking youth, and the lady's-maid, were conspicuous. The housekeeper came forward and bowed to the ladies, offering Mrs Moore the keys.

'No; you keep them,' said Jenkins, waving her aside. 'Mrs Moore isn't to soil her hands, nor her mind, nor anything else about her, with worries. You keep them, and attend to your business. You can all go down to the kitchen premises now. I'll take my relations round the new house myself.'

So round the house they went, Martha's heart aching all the time.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PEARL RING.

NEARLY a week elapsed before things settled down a little. Jenkins had become accustomed to marching through the rooms, often shutting his eyes as he did so to allow the dream of his life to become mentally visible. He spoke more than ever of his mother, and of what she would have wished. He rummaged up some old letters of hers and got his sister Polly to read them aloud in the evenings; and whenever any allusion was made in these letters to housekeeping or furnishing he would clap his hand on his knee and say, 'There 's an idea for the house. I know my mother would have liked this or that to be so.'

Accordingly, however monstrous the suggestion, if, in the opinion of Mr Jenkins, such was the fashion in the days of his beloved mother, he carried it out on a huge scale in Jenkins Manor.

But though they both tried very hard, neither Mrs Moore nor Jenkins could reconcile themselves to the lady's-maid or the valet. The valet, indeed, proved himself to be a fruitful source of mischief. Jenkins could not endure him, and shuddered when the time

came to dress for dinner. His first thought in the morning was of that objectionable young man; and he grew quite pale when the valet made his appearance, or was even mentioned in his presence. Nevertheless, for the sake of appearances, Jenkins thought it his duty to put up with him, even though his appetite suffered from the infliction.

'You can lay the things out, and go,' he would say on some of these occasions. 'Go, I tell you; leave the room and shut the door. Go!'

'But I thought, sir, you would like me to help you to—to shave,' replied the valet, who was the bearer of the proud name of Augustus.

'Go!' shouted Jenkins in a louder key; and the terrified, but secretly amused Augustus retired. Once he put his eye to the keyhole, and almost burst into a fit of laughter when he saw Jenkins going round the room on tiptoe examining the various articles of his wardrobe.

Mrs Moore was far more dignified with the lady's-maid. 'You can overlook my wardrobe,' she said; 'and if you think I specially require anything let me know, and I shall endeavour to get it; but I prefer to attend to my own dressing.'

'You would like me to arrange your hair, perhaps, madam?' queried Louisa in a very supercilious tone.

'No, thank you. I like best to do it myself.'

Louisa said nothing; but, crossing the passage, knocked at Martha's door. Martha was seated near the window, gazing pensively on the garden.

'Come in,' she cried when she heard the knock.

Louisa appeared. 'It is nearly time for you to

dress for dinner, miss. Which dress do you wish to put on to-night?'

'Oh! thank you,' answered Martha, looking round a little anxiously. 'I wish to dress myself, please.'

'Then will you allow me to do your hair, miss? I know quite the most becoming modes.'

'No, thank you. I am very much obliged; but I like to do my own hair.'

Louisa swept out of the room, shutting the door with considerable noise, and once more appeared in Mrs Moore's presence.

'I have been mistaken in the ladies of this establishment,' she said. 'I wish, madam, to give you notice. I should like to leave in the morning. I will forego my month's wages, madam. I really cannot stay where I am not required.'

'It would be an excellent plan,' said Mrs Moore, 'if you would go quietly, and not say anything about it. Neither my daughter nor I like being waited on; we have not been accustomed to it.'

'Any one can see that, madam,' replied Louisa.

'Here is a sovereign, my good girl. If you will go as quietly as possible you will afford us great relief.'

So Louisa departed. Jenkins, being considerably worried by the attentions of the valet, was not aware of her departure. He thought his sister and niece as stylish-looking women as he had ever set eyes on; and he was altogether too uncomfortable in his evening clothes, now donned for the first time, to observe any possible defects in others.

By degrees, however, things did shake themselves down, and family life proceeded under the new and unaccustomed lines with comparative equanimity.

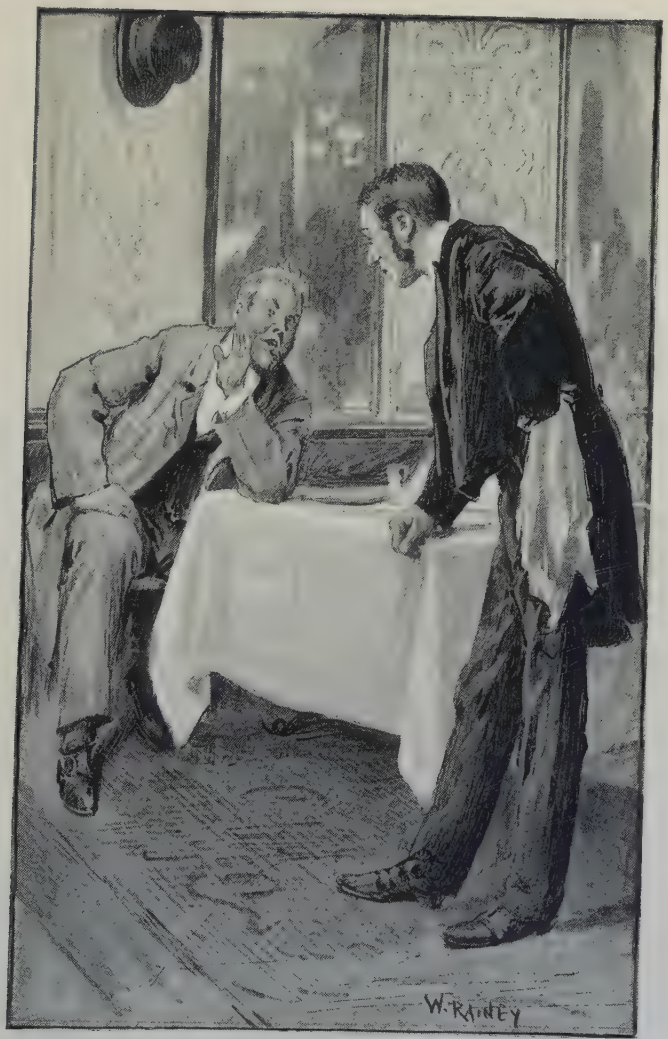
About this time Thomas Jenkins became much exercised in his mind about Clarissa; she still pleased him mightily. When she came to see Martha in the new house and went through the rooms, she took considerable interest even in the drawing-room; and when Jenkins told her he had furnished the house in accordance with what he believed his dead mother would have wished, Clarissa applauded his sentiments. She seemed to understand Jenkins. She was so devoted to her father that she thought it was quite natural, even forty years after his mother's death, that Jenkins should treasure her memory and respect her opinions.

'It's very fine of him,' she said to Martha, who could not agree with her remarks.

'If you lived with him you would not think it so fine,' replied Martha. 'If you had a grandmother mentioned to you on every possible occasion, and all your actions and every word you spoke contrasted with what she would have said, or how she would have acted, you would not think the practice quite so agreeable.'

Nevertheless, Clarissa held to her opinion.

Jenkins thought Clarissa one of the nicest, brightest young ladies it had ever been his good fortune to meet. However, the thought of the books which her mother would not allow her to read rankled a good deal in his mind, and he wondered what he could give her in their stead. Not that he wanted the books back; but he wished Clarissa to know that he thought well of her, that he considered her a very nice young girl, and that he was willing, if possible, to do her a kindness. He thought and thought, and at last went up to town alone, to cogitate on the subject.



'Now, I am a bit puzzled. . . . Do you think you could help me?'
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Thomas Jenkins was so wealthy that his money seemed to be always burning a hole in his pocket. He was never really happy except when he was spending money. As the house was now furnished as full as any ordinary house ought to be, and as several gardeners were employed in laying out the grounds according to Jenkins's idea (large greenhouses and fountains were in progress), and he had ordered a carriage for his sister and a pony-trap for Martha, there really seemed nothing else on which he could expend his wealth, for the time being at any rate. If he could, therefore, spend something in buying a really suitable present for Clarissa he would enjoy immense gratification.

When he arrived in town he took lunch at his favourite hotel, the 'George,' and summoned his 'Child's Guide,' as he playfully termed his own special waiter, to his side.

'Well, sir, and how are things going with you?' asked that young man.

'Very well indeed,' Jenkins replied.

'Ah! I hope the valet I recommended, sir, is quite equal to the duties?'

'Oh! I have no fault to find with Augustus,' answered Jenkins. He pursed up his lips as he spoke, colouring a little, and looking down at his plate in a shame-faced way. After a time he looked up again at the head-waiter. 'You have often given me a bit of advice, and I am obliged to you,' he said. 'Although I am rich I have lived for a long time out of the country, so there are various things I ought to know which I don't know. Now, I am a bit puzzled over a certain matter of some delicacy; and, as two heads are better than one, do you think you could help me?'

'Anything in my power, sir,' replied the head-waiter, who knew that these remarks were generally followed by a very substantial tip. 'If I can give you any information, sir—being, so to speak, well acquainted with England, and London in particular—I shall be very proud to do so.'

'I am sure you will,' answered Jenkins. 'As I said before, I am always obliged, and always willing to pay for any trouble I give.'

'No trouble, sir; you may be assured of that.'

'Now, look here,' said Jenkins, 'you just stoop down, for I don't want anybody else to hear. Suppose you were me, for instance'——

'Yes, sir, supposing'—— The young man hesitated; his eyes glittered at the thought of how very delightful it would be to leave his present life for the wealth and prosperity which evidently surrounded Jenkins.

'Suppose you were me,' continued Thomas Jenkins, 'which of course you are not; and suppose there was a young girl you had taken a fancy to—a girl young enough to be your daughter or granddaughter, a nice, pretty school-girl—and you wanted to give her something as a gift, what should it be? Now, put your considering-cap on, and tell me what you think it ought to be.'

The head-waiter did put on his considering-cap, his eyes gleaming with suppressed enjoyment. He looked at Thomas Jenkins, and wondered what sort of girl he was referring to.

'You must be careful what you say,' continued Jenkins, 'for I have spoken already on the subject to a bookseller, as honest-looking a fellow as you could

come across, and yet that man was an out-and-out rogue, and told me that I ought to give her love stories; and, would you believe it?—— Why, what are you laughing at?'

'Oh, nothing, sir. I beg your pardon.' The waiter suppressed the mirth which rose to his lips.

'Well, I gave her a lot of love stories, and her mother locked them up, and said they were not fit for her to read. Now, what would you give her if you were in my position?'

'Young ladies are always very partial, if I might venture to make the remark'——

'"Very partial"—go on. Of course you can make the remark; I asked your advice. Here 's ten shillings, by-the-by; you may want to go to the theatre to-night.'

'Thank you, sir, very much.'

'Well, what are young ladies partial to? Out with it.'

'I should say they were specially partial to rings,' replied the waiter; and then he started back and looked at Jenkins almost with alarm.

'Rings! jewellery! I never thought of that,' said Jenkins. 'I am very much obliged to you,' he added. 'You need not wait any longer. Take your ten shillings. Good-morning.'

Jenkins was quite excited. This was indeed a brilliant idea, an idea which meant the expenditure of money—the spending, in fact, of a considerable amount. Nothing could make Thomas Jenkins happier. He put his hands deep down into his trousers-pockets, fastened his coat, ordered a hansom, and drove at once to a jeweller's in Bond Street. This jeweller

had been recommended to him by the head-waiter. On arrival he got out of the hansom, walked into the large and splendid shop, and asked to see rings.

'Wedding-rings, sir?' asked the jeweller, who had a spark of fun in him.

Jenkins replied majestically that he did not wish to see wedding-rings. 'I want a ring,' he said, 'suitable to give as a present to a girl who might be my daughter or granddaughter.'

'Oh yes, sir,' said the jeweller in a respectful tone.

'I want something pretty and not showy,' continued Jenkins. 'I want something good, which will yet be the sort of ring a young lady would wear.'

'I quite understand, sir,' answered the jeweller.

'Produce the kind of rings you think most suitable for a refined—very refined—young lady, not of my class in life. I don't pretend that I was born in the upper classes. I have risen to them. I am as fine a gentleman now as any in the land; but the girl, she was born in the upper class. Now you understand?'

Oh, perfectly, sir,' the jeweller replied. He produced a little tray of rings of all sorts and sizes, and of many degrees of value. Diamond rings, sapphire and emerald rings, ruby rings, diamond and ruby rings, diamond and sapphire rings—all these reposed in magnificence on the little tray.

'Would any of these be just the thing for the young lady?' asked Jenkins.

'How old might the lady be?' inquired the shopman.

'Sixteen or sixteen and a half, I take it—a schoolgirl.'

'Then, sir, I think—pardon me—that the ring ought

to be simple. Young ladies of that age don't often wear rings at all.'

Jenkins's jaw dropped. 'Is that so?' he said. 'That's rather alarming. She has got a mother who is blessed particular, I take it. Well, but if young ladies do wear rings what sort would do?'

'Any of these would be suitable,' replied the man. He submitted another tray for Jenkins's inspection. It contained rings beautiful with pearls and turquoise. Jenkins was delighted with the turquoise rings; but the jeweller favoured the pearl.

'There's something so simple about pearls,' he said. 'Pearls—good pearls—are very valuable. You can pay any price for them.'

'I want to pay a good price,' said Jenkins. 'I don't wish to give a poor ring. I want to give a ring which looks quiet and yet would fetch a good round sum of money. Well, what is this worth?'

Presently Thomas Jenkins was induced to purchase a ring which cost sixty pounds. It contained two pearls, and was very beautiful, and at the same time looked simple.

'I may as well have two of these,' said Jenkins. 'Martha would like one on her little finger too.'

He bought the two rings, and slipped the little boxes into his pocket. He was now in the greatest good-humour; he had at last got something which the best gentleman in the land could find no fault with.

'If I were really her father, and as rich as a duke, I could not give her better than this,' he thought; and he took the little rings out of their cases and looked at them several times on his journey back to Upton. When he got there he thought he would go straight

to Professor Rodney's house and present Clarissa with his gift.

He arrived at the house between six and seven o'clock, far too late for an ordinary call; but Jenkins knew nothing of this. The servant opened the door, and he inquired for Miss Clarissa.

The girl took Jenkins up to the drawing-room, where Clarissa, accompanied by her mother, soon joined him.

Mrs Rodney was a little stiff to Mr Jenkins, and he was considerably frightened of Mrs Rodney. He feared that if he gave the ring in her presence it might be locked up in the bookcase with the love stories. Clarissa was all that was charming; but her mother's presence made her also a little *distrait;* she was not quite so refreshing and natural in manner as usual.

Jenkins asked several questions about the Professor, and Clarissa turned to her mother and said, 'Don't you think father would like to see Mr Jenkins to-night? I was telling father all about Mr Jenkins's extensive knowledge of the goldfields in Queensland; and I think father would be interested.'

'Your father cannot possibly see strangers to-night,' replied Mrs Rodney.

'Then, mother, may I go to father and ask when he would like to see Mr Jenkins?'

Mrs Rodney hesitated, and looked angry; but finally she conceded Clarissa's request.

Jenkins fidgeted on his chair. He could not bear Mrs Rodney; she was, as he expressed it, no end of a fine lady. In memory he contrasted her with his mother, much to Mrs Rodney's disadvantage.

He tried to talk on all sorts of subjects, and Mrs Rodney invariably snubbed him. Finally, he began to praise Clarissa. 'She is a very fine girl,' said Jenkins. 'She has a way with her which takes my heart.'

Mrs Rodney was very stiff and indignant; she did not want Clarissa to take Jenkins's heart.

Presently the girl returned, telling Jenkins that her father would be very pleased to see him if he could manage to call on the following afternoon at four o'clock; then the worthy man, seeing there was no help for it, stood up to take his leave.

'Is it wise for your father to see Mr Jenkins to-morrow?' interrupted Mrs Rodney. 'You know Mr Sarson is coming to-morrow, and one visitor will be quite as much as your dear father has strength for at present.'

'Mr Sarson does not come until eight o'clock,' Clarissa replied, turning a little pale; 'and father really did say that it would give him pleasure to have a chat with Mr Jenkins to-morrow.'

'Then I will have the utmost pleasure in waiting on the Professor,' said Jenkins, making a profound bow. He held out his hand to Mrs Rodney, who took it stiffly and dropped it again in an instant. He then turned to Clarissa. 'Can I have a word with you, miss, in the hall?'

Mrs Rodney's face flushed with annoyance. Clarissa also felt a little nervous. There was no help for it, however. Clarissa and Jenkins left the room, and Mrs Rodney heard them going downstairs side by side.

'This,' said Jenkins, thrusting his hand into his

pocket and producing the box—'is just a token of my regard. You can't imagine how pleased I am with you. You have always been so civil to me, so polite, just the sort of girl I would like to have for a niece or a daughter; and as your good lady-mother disapproved of the love stories, I thought this would be more suitable. Here it is. Don't open the box now. I'd like well to see it on your finger when you come to take tea with Martha. Good-bye, and may God bless you, Miss Clarissa.'

Jenkins went out of the house, leaving a tiny morocco case in Clarissa's hand. She wondered what was in it. Her heart beat a trifle faster for a moment, and she would have opened it; but just then her mother's step was heard on the stair.

'What did that man want with you, Clare?' she asked.

'Oh, nothing, mother—nothing special,' replied Clarissa.

Mrs Rodney scrutinised her daughter. Clarissa's face bore a troubled look. She hated herself for deceiving her mother; but she did not want to show the contents of the little case. Mrs Rodney would probably be very angry, and would doubtless return the gift to Jenkins with a somewhat insulting note; so Clarissa rushed upstairs to her room.

Janet was already there; she had a cold, and was seated by a fire which had been lit specially for her. 'Oh! is that you, Clare?' she cried. 'I was so lonely. Why didn't you come before?'

'That delicious, funny man, Mr Jenkins, was here,' replied Clarissa.

'Oh dear! I wish I had been well. I'd have liked to see him. The Anticlimax man—isn't he?'

'The Antipodes man, my love. Is your cold any better, Janey?'

'I don't know,' answered the child. 'My head aches, and I shiver a good bit.'

'You ought to get into bed. I will tell mother you are not well. Would you like the doctor to come?'

'Oh no; I am not so bad as that. If I could just get warm I'd be all right.'

'I'll put you into bed in a few minutes; but, first, do you think you could stand a secret?'

'A secret!' exclaimed little Janet. 'Oh, I love secrets!'

'It is in connection with the great big secret,' said Clarissa with a sigh; 'at least I think it is. Mr Jenkins gave me this.'

As she spoke she took the little case out of her pocket. Janet uttered an excited scream.

'Best lock the door,' said Janet, who was wise for her years.

Clarissa did so.

'Now, let's poke the fire. Here's a jolly blaze. Now, open the case.'

Clarissa did so, and there, reposing on its velvet bed, was the lovely pearl ring. If Jenkins was wanting in good taste the Bond Street jeweller was not; and the ring was both handsome and simple.

The girl slipped it on her finger and uttered a cry of delight.

'Oh! isn't it a beauty?' she said. 'He is a dear. He

may be rough; but he is quite a dear. I can't tell how much I like him. I am sure father will understand him even if mother does not.'

'Mother doesn't understand those sort of people,' said little Janet. 'Are you going to show her the ring, Clare?'

Clarissa's face turned white.

'She would take it away. No, I won't show it—not yet,' replied Clarissa. She put it back into its case; and, going to her wardrobe, placed it in a drawer, which she carefully locked.

Clarissa went downstairs that evening burdened with a secret which was at once troublesome and delightful. She had never had a ring before, and the thought of it for the time being quite banished all her gloomy reflections. Things must be coming right when she had been given such a valuable, such a delicious present. She wished she could show it to her father and her mother, and wear it before every one; but she dared not take her mother into her secret —at least, not yet. Presently she went upstairs again, where Janet, still hot and feverish, was wide awake and tossing about.

'You know, Clare, that mother is going to open the missionary-box on Sunday?'

'Yes, I know,' answered Clarissa.

'She 'll miss that sovereign. What are we to say?'

'I sha'n't be in the room; I shall go out on purpose. I will give the money back; but, oh! it 's terrible of mother to open the box. Really and truly,' continued Clarissa, 'I have always been a good sort of girl until I went to London to see Sir John Carbery; but since then I have been concealing things from mother, and

acting deceitfully. I hate myself, and yet there is no help for it.'

'What will you do when the month is up?' inquired Janet. 'I think of it day and night. I am always thinking and always wondering. Mother will be sure to make a fuss, and she will accuse some of the servants of having opened the missionary-box, for she keeps an account of the money that is in it.'

'I tell you what,' said Clarissa, 'we might try to prevent her opening it. Can you think of a plan?'

Janet sat up in bed, looking very wise. 'I wish I could,' she answered after a pause. 'We might hide it.'

'If mother could get something else to do. There is no real need for her to open it until after the 20th of November. It's only a sort of idea she has got into her head. What can we do to keep her from opening it? Suppose we were to coax her to come out with us, and suppose we were to put the missionary-box in father's room behind a pile of books?'

'But mother generally writes down what she has to do during the day; and I saw her write down about the missionary-box,' Janet said. 'Mother's memory isn't what it was; but I know—I could hide the slate on which she writes things. I could let it slip behind the escritoire. She would look for it, but she wouldn't look there. Oh! we are awfully, awfully deceitful, Clare.'

'I am afraid we are,' said Clarissa. 'I am afraid we are downright wicked. Let us talk no more now, Janey.'

'If I might just look at your darling ring again,' said Janet. 'I have been dreaming about it; the great

pearl seemed to get bigger and bigger, and I seemed to see it down in its oyster-shell. Oh dear! it's most exciting. It is such a wonderful thing, and to have lived like that hidden away!'

'I want to see it too,' said Clarissa. She unlocked her drawer, took out the little case, and both girls gazed with hungry, delighted eyes at the ring.

CHAPTER XXI.

PICKLED WALNUTS AND A PROFESSOR.

FOR some hours during that night Clarissa was anxious and sleepless. Her trouble was near, and there seemed no way of escape. The thought of Mr Sarson's arrival caused her immeasurable alarm. She did not know what her father would say to him. Even a hint to her father not to make an acknowledgment to Mr Sarson would lead to discovery. She wondered if she might confide in Mr Sarson; but, knowing him well, she felt that would be impossible. He was a very reserved man, who hated women, and came to Upton only for the sake of having a chat with his old friend Professor Rodney.

Towards morning the idea suddenly occurred to Clarissa that she might ask Thomas Jenkins to help her. Perhaps, if she told him the whole story, he would lend her the money to pay Sir John Carbery and return the sovereign to the missionary-box; and then she would repay him by instalments out of her allowance. It was just the sort of idea which would come to a girl in her circumstances; for Thomas Jenkins was both rich and of a kindly disposition, and she was certain beyond doubt that she stood well in his favour,

because she had sympathised with him and appreciated his feelings of regard for the memory of his mother. She had always been pleasant to him, and even saw the gentleman under his rough exterior; therefore, rough as he was, she believed she could trust him, and that he would not think the worse of her for the confidence.

Quite relieved at the thought of an appeal to Thomas Jenkins, she fell towards morning into a deep, untroubled sleep.

The day following was Saturday; and as that was a holiday, Clarissa had a good deal to do in the house. In the first place, Janet was still feverish and otherwise not at all well; so Mrs Rodney deputed Clarissa to be her nurse. Clarissa was very fond of her little sister, and stayed with her for some time, making the room pretty, and talking cheerfully. She got the little girl to sit up in bed, and gave her some of her favourite story-books to read.

Janet enjoyed herself vastly. 'I shall be quite well by the evening,' she said; 'and I love a real cosy day in bed—that is, when I'm not in pain.'

Clarissa was longing to see Martha Moore before she spoke to Thomas Jenkins. She wanted to consult with Martha about borrowing the money. Clarissa received fifteen pounds a year for her modest wardrobe. It was only with the utmost economy she could provide everything with this sum; but she now contemplated doing so on a greatly reduced amount in order to repay Thomas Jenkins in small sums the loan she proposed to ask. After she had made up her mind, she told Janet of her plans.

At first Janet did not approve; she had a great deal

of wisdom for her years, and said, 'I think if father and mother discover that you have borrowed money they will be much more angry than if you were to tell them the truth about going to the doctor when you really thought you could spend your scholarship money on his fees.' But in the end the little sister was turned round to Clarissa's way of thinking.

'The one thing necessary is to keep the knowledge from father,' Clarissa explained. 'It would drive him wild, and it is the sort of thing mother would never forgive. No, I must get some one to help me; and there is no one except Mr Jenkins.'

'Very well; if you think so, of course it is right,' replied Janet. 'It will be a great relief when you have put the matter straight.'

'Do you think you can spare me for an hour or two to go round and see Martha?' Clarissa inquired.

'Oh, of course; but why do you want to see her?'

'Because I won't do anything without consulting her.'

Accordingly Clarissa put on her hat and jacket and ran downstairs. Mrs Rodney, in the dining-room busy with her accounts, raised her head when she saw her daughter, and said in an irritated tone, 'Really expenses multiply at an alarming rate. I don't believe we shall be able to clear up this quarter, however hard we try. It will end in our drawing a little, a very little, on your father's slender capital, and that is the sort of thing I deeply regret.'

Clarissa stood still, with a blank expression on her face.

'It is a very good thing, my dear,' continued her mother, 'that you managed to win the Randall Scholar-

ship; it will enable you to continue your education at practically little or no expense. We feared we should be obliged to take you from the school during the coming term.'

'Oh, mother, I am not half-educated,' replied Clarissa.

'My dear, that would have been a matter of little consequence compared to the evil of getting into debt; that I could never, under any circumstances, permit. You know, dear, what my opinions are on that matter. You remember I could not even consent to Sir John Carbery visiting your father owing to the tremendous expense. Fortunately, that kind Mr Sarson stepped in in the most providential way. I shall always feel that the dear, reserved, queer man has saved your father's life.'

'But you—you won't say anything to him, mother?'

'Say anything? Really, my dear Clarissa, I am not going to state what I mean to do. I shall do nothing improper. I cannot permit you, my dear, to make remarks of that kind to me.'

'Oh, I am sorry, mother,' Clarissa answered. 'Do you greatly mind if I go out now for a bit?'

'Where to? You are always running out. Why don't you sit with your little sister? If Janet is not better in an hour or two I shall have to send for Dr Bennett.'

'But I am sure she is better, mother. She seems much cooler, and is quite cheerful. I won't be long.'

'Where are you going, my dear?'

'I thought I would run round and see Martha Moore.'

'I am perfectly tired of those Moores,' said Mrs Rodney, 'and of that impertinent, rough, ungentle-

manly man who called yesterday, presuming on account of his lately acquired wealth to come into our society, and saying he wished to have a special word with you in the hall. He is an intolerable person; and how your father can take a fancy to him amazes me. I shall certainly not encourage him to come to this house. I hope he has not been giving you any more presents; it would be just the sort of thing he would do. What are you colouring for, Clarissa? Has he given you anything more?'

'No, mother,' replied Clarissa in a low voice. Then she hated herself for the lie.—'I am getting more wicked and mean every moment,' she thought.

Mrs Rodney did not put any more questions when she had said 'No, mother.' She was stern enough to both her children, but she had implicit confidence in their truthfulness. 'Well, go if you must, and be quick back,' she said; 'and don't encourage that person to visit here.'

'You misjudge him, really, mother; and you know, too, he is coming this afternoon, for father has invited him.'

'Yes, he is evidently the sort of man your father takes a prodigious fancy to. Your father's taste and yours are quite alike; you both always take to eccentric people. But you may go now—don't keep me idling any longer.'

Clarissa left the room, and walked quickly in the direction of Jenkins Manor, arriving there just in time to see Martha preparing to go out.

'Oh, you are here, Clare!' exclaimed Martha; 'let me take you into my sitting-room. You have not seen it yet.'

Clarissa eagerly consented, and the two crossed the hall into the pretty sitting-room. It looked out on the garden, and was refined in every detail of furnishing and decoration.

'Isn't it sweet, compared to the rest of the house?' asked Martha. 'It is my refuge; but the worst of it is, poor darling mother cannot spend much of her time here. Uncle Tom is always routing her out. He won't come into the room; he says that to step across this threshold would make him sick; but he stands in front of the window and says, "Come out, Polly. What are you hiding in there for?" and out the darling mater has to go. Really and truly'—— Martha hesitated. 'What is it, Clare?'

'Oh! let me see that on your finger,' cried Clarissa. She sprang forward, and taking Martha's hand, looked at the lovely pearl ring.

'Uncle Tom brought it to me yesterday. It is wonderfully pretty, and in really good taste.' Martha looked at the ring with absolute affection.

'He brought me one just the same,' said Clarissa in a tone of awe. 'Martha, dear, I want to speak to you. Can you spare me five minutes? I want to say something very, very important.'

'I can give you half-an-hour or an hour,' was Martha's response. 'If it wasn't for the interest of school, I'd have simply nothing to do; and do you know what Uncle Tom's last idea is? It is that I should go to a first-rate boarding-school, where I can be turned into what he calls a tip-topper—that is his polite expression. He is to be a tip-topper, and mother and I are to tip-top with him. It is really too trying. —But what is it? Do speak; you look so depressed.

Oh, I suppose it is the terrible secret. What am I to do for you, Clare? There is nothing I would not do to help you.'

'I have been thinking of something,' said Clarissa, coming forward. She drew her chair close up to Martha's. 'It is this,' she continued. 'I am in despair. Mr Sarson comes to-night, and mother opens the missionary-box to-morrow. Mother will find out that the sovereign is missing, and either mother or father will say something to Mr Sarson about his kindness in having paid Sir John Carbery's fee. I hope father will be the first to speak to him, but it is just as likely that mother will refer to the matter; for father would really do it with such extreme delicacy that Mr Sarson, who is somewhat obtuse, might possibly not know what he is talking about. But mother, if she does speak to him on the subject, will make it as plain—well, as plain as that there is a sun in the sky at this moment.'

'I am extremely sorry for you,' answered Martha. 'I wish I could help you. If Uncle Tom gave me a large allowance I would try, by saving some of it, and you could pay me back as you liked; but he has given up that idea, and says that he does not approve of girls having money of their own, and that what I have to do is to order things and let him pay the bills. So I have to order things from my dressmaker, and things from the London shops; and, as far as I can see, I am not to have a sixpence of my own to spend. It is a horrid, horrid plan, just on a par with all the rest.'

'What I was thinking of,' Clarissa continued desperately, 'is this. I was thinking of confiding in

Mr Jenkins; he is very kind to me, and perhaps he would lend me the money.'

Martha's face turned red and then pale.

'I could pay him back by instalments,' continued Clarissa. 'I get fifteen pounds a year for dress. I would try and dress for half that amount. I have a very fair wardrobe at present, and I would make it last; and I would give Mr Jenkins seven pounds ten shillings a year, and by degrees I could pay off the money. Do you think he would agree? Oh, it would be such a relief! You don't know what a relief it would be, Martha.'

The colour had now quite faded from Martha's face. 'I am afraid it won't do,' she said slowly.

'Won't do? Why?'

'Because Uncle Tom is such a queer man. Do you know, I think he would be inclined to have a very poor opinion of you if he knew you had done what you did. He said to me only yesterday, "I hate girls who go in debt. My idea of a girl is that she should be simple and dependent, and not have ideas of her own. What does a girl want with ideas? Even women have but small call to air their thoughts. It is the men who ought to have ideas. I like old-fashioned girls." Oh, he talked a lot in that way; and, do you know, I absolutely thought of you at the time, and I said something about a girl who might perhaps get into money difficulties. Of course I didn't let out for a moment it was you. I said that girls did sometimes, and that I for one could not blame them. You cannot imagine what a rage he got into. He said, "Patty, I trust I may never hear you speak in that way again. I have a letter of my mother's

upstairs in which she speaks of the borrowing wife. It is beautiful the way she speaks." He went out of the room that moment, and hunted it up, and brought it down and read it aloud to me. It was all the most ridiculous nonsense you ever listened to; but he swears by it. I don't think he would lend you the money. He would fail to understand what you meant. Don't try it, Clare. I am very, very sorry. I will try hard to make him give me a little allowance; and as soon as ever he does you are welcome to the greater part of it; but don't ask him to help you, for I know he would not. Besides, he is going away for ten days, which practically clinches the matter. You must pay Sir John Carbery on the 20th—must you not? Well, Uncle Tom is going away this evening; he is going to see some friends of his in the north of England, and won't be back for from ten days to a fortnight. Mother and I mean to enjoy ourselves during that time.'

Clarissa stood up. She looked at her friend from head to foot. It seemed to her at that moment that riches had not improved Martha; that she was more sympathising, more interesting when she was poor and shabby. She was dressed now in a somewhat showy, heavy fashion, which had not improved her in any sense of the word. The pearl ring on her finger and the clear light in her gray eyes redeemed her appearance, however; and Clarissa said to herself, 'I ought not to hate her because she is well-off and comfortable, and—though she does not know it—happy. I ought to bear my own burden. I will try.' She turned the conversation, therefore, with that dignity which was part of her character, and soon afterwards took her leave.

At four o'clock that afternoon Thomas Jenkins made his appearance at the Rodneys' house. The Professor was very much better, and had been moved down to his study. He was expecting his friend George Sarson in the course of the evening, but was not on that account at all the less pleased to welcome Thomas Jenkins. The Professor had great intuition and a large supply of tact, and he soon drew the rough man out, and got him to talk his best.

Thomas Jenkins was charmed; he saw that he was interesting the Professor. Mr Rodney asked the most intelligent questions, and really received much valuable information from Jenkins.

'I must get you to read my lecture when it appears,' he said. 'I am greatly obliged to you.'

Jenkins went away feeling that it was little wonder Clarissa was such a fascinating girl. 'She takes after her father,' he said to himself. 'I wish I had seen the lass somewhere about; but I didn't catch a sight of her. It was that proud lady-mother who doubtless managed that.'

By the last train that evening Thomas Jenkins went off on his visit to the north of England. He was loath to go; but some relations of his dead mother's had written to him demanding his help, and such a demand went straight to his honest heart. By the last train which left Upton that evening Jenkins departed, and by the last incoming train Mr Sarson arrived. Now, just before his arrival Mrs Rodney, nicely dressed and looking gracious and beautiful, entered the study. The fire was blazing cheerily in the grate, Mr Rodney's favourite lamp stood on a table near his side. He was lying on the sofa, looking pleased and interested.

'I have arranged that Mr Sarson has supper,' said Mrs Rodney. 'He will not care for dinner so late.'

'George Sarson does not care what he eats,' was Mr Rodney's response. 'I suppose we shall find him as eccentric as ever, my dear.'

'Doubtless,' said Mrs Rodney; 'but we owe him a debt of gratitude; we must not forget that. By the way, James, I have been thinking that any thanks might come best from me.'

'What do you mean?' said Mr Rodney, knitting his brows slightly, and looking full at his wife.

'I should be sure to put it in a very direct and yet firm way. If you speak at all, you will bewilder the poor man. I think he ought to know that we—we suspect, and that we are very, very grateful. Sir John Carbery is coming down again on Tuesday, and very likely Mr Sarson and he will meet; and it might be better to be quite straightforward, and let Mr Sarson know that we appreciate his great kindness.'

'Well, as you please, Miriam,' replied her husband. 'You will be careful what you say, however; for, of course, Sarson supposes that we know nothing about it.'

Mrs Rodney talked for a few moments longer to her husband. She then went upstairs to the girls' bedroom.

Janet, much better, was seated by the fire. Clarissa was changing her dress.

'Make yourself as nice as you can, dear,' said her mother. She sat down by the fire and stretched out her arms to Janet to spring into them. 'Better, dear little girl?' she said in her most affectionate tone.

'Oh yes, mummy, much, much better,' replied Janet.

'I have come to say,' continued Mrs Rodney, looking full at Clarissa, 'that I myself shall say something to Mr Sarson about his kindness.'

'Oh! mother, I wouldn't,' said Clarissa, speaking abruptly. 'Why should you speak about it?'

'How do you know that he did it, mummy?' here interrupted Janet, speaking in as coaxing a tone as she could assume.

'How do I know that he did it?' repeated Mrs Rodney. 'Really, my dear little girl, I am not going to consult you as to what I know, and what I don't know. There was no one else to do it. The doctor assured me that Sir John Carbery was to be paid his full fee, and that he was coming again next week. Mr Sarson, of course, has been our benefactor; and I wish you, Clarissa, to go downstairs looking your best. He will be here any moment. Ah! I think that is his ring.' Mrs Rodney left the room, and Clarissa turned to face Janet.

'Now, what is to be done?' she said. 'I seem foiled at every turn. Martha was almost nasty to-day about Mr Jenkins.'

'You should never have consulted her,' said little Janet. 'I didn't quite approve of your asking him to lend you the money. I don't know why; but I didn't. It seemed to me worse than thinking you could take the scholarship money; but I don't see why Martha should have been nasty about it.'

'He would have lent it, I am certain,' said Clarissa. 'I would have put it so that he could not help it. I would have assured him that I had done it for the love of my father, and I'd have quoted his love for his mother, and begged for his sympathy. He

would have done it, and I'd have been all right now; but there, he's going away to the north of England, and that hope is quite at an end. Oh! what shall I do? How shall I prevent mother speaking to Mr Sarson?'

'Well, she won't speak to-night,' said Janet. 'Do go downstairs now, and try to be happy. It is more than eight days before you need pay Sir John, and a great deal may take place in eight days.'

Clarissa, who had put on a simple white frock, and looked very nice and girlish and sweet, ran downstairs. Mr Sarson had arrived, and was talking to Mr Rodney in the study.

An appetising supper was spread in the dining-room at the other side of the hall.

'You look very well, Clarissa,' said her mother. 'Now, go softly into the study and tell Mr Sarson that supper is ready. I have prepared your father's oysters and champagne; they will be sent in to him when we are at supper.'

Clarissa went into the library without a word. She had not seen Mr Sarson for many years. He was a little, dried-up, withered man; he had something of the appearance of a Ribston pippin. His face was full of lines, but his cheeks were rosy; his eyes were blue and sunken in his head; his hair was white and pushed back from a very lofty forehead. The white hair stood up in a sort of halo above the white forehead. He had also white whiskers, but his upper lip was clean-shaven. Mr Sarson despised dress of every sort. When once he got into a suit he considered that he was clothed, and did not care how shabby that suit became. He was a man with plenty of money; but

money to him for its own sake was absolutely valueless. When his servant assured him that his suit of clothes was unfit to be worn any longer, he ordered a fresh suit to be made on identically the same pattern; and put that on and wore it out until the same remark was made. When he arrived at Upton the period had almost come for his servant to assure him that he must get a new suit. The black of his coat had long degenerated into green; it shone at the elbows, and there was a suspicion of holes near the buttons. His trousers were baggy and as old as the coat, and his waistcoat was old-fashioned in make and dingy in colour.

He stood up when Clarissa came in and gave her a little bow, scarcely raising his eyes to her face, for he had a great dislike to all women.

'Supper is ready, please,' said Clarissa.

'Will you follow my daughter into the next room, Sarson,' said Mr Rodney. 'I must apologise for not accompanying you; but I am not well enough yet to use my legs.'

Mr Sarson bowed with old-fashioned courtly grace, and followed Clarissa from the room.

Mrs Rodney had already seen the Professor. He thought her a fine-looking woman; and as Rodney had selected her for his wife, supposed that she must have some merits. As to Clarissa, she was not worth a second glance. He sat down by the table, and asked the ladies if they would have any objection to his wearing blue spectacles.

'Certainly not, if you wish to wear them, Mr Sarson,' said Mrs Rodney.

'I always do if I have to look at a white cloth,' he

replied. 'In my own house I never allow a white cloth to be put upon the table. You do not know, madam, how bad it is for the eyes to stare for a lengthened period at anything dazzling.' Here he took a spectacle-case out of his pocket and adjusted large blue glasses over his eyes. The glasses evidently afforded him great relief, for he looked quite cheerfully round and said, 'Ha! ha! good that!' when the cover was removed from some stewed steak. Mrs Rodney helped him to a small portion; he ate ravenously, and immediately held out his plate for more. I am hungry,' he said. 'I had a long journey. I only eat twice a day. I consider food partaken of oftener extremely bad for the constitution. How many times a day do you eat, madam?'

'Oh! three or four times. We have the usual number of meals,' said Mrs Rodney.

Clarissa, who faced Mr Sarson, could not help looking at him with a kind of awe. What would he say when her mother made that dreadful remark with regard to her father? She felt so uncomfortable and miserable that she almost wished that it might take place while she was in the room; it would be better to bear the full brunt of the battle than to think that something awful was going on behind her back. Accordingly she led the conversation, with a kind of desperate desire to face the worst, into the most dangerous channels.

Mrs Rodney looked at her with a sort of displeased surprise.

'How do you think father is looking?' was Clarissa's first remark.

'Looking—eh?' said Mr Sarson. 'Can't say I

noticed. He seems all right again. Was his illness serious, madam?'

'Well, Mr Sarson, you ought to know that—ought you not?' was Mrs Rodney's very pointed reply.

'I ought to know it? Bless my soul, why?—Have the goodness to hand me those pickles.'

Clarissa handed some walnut pickles across the table. Mr Sarson helped himself to three large walnuts, which he proceeded to eat, one after the other, without making any remark until he had finished. He then said, 'Health is a matter entirely dependent on the individual. I have studied health from every point of view, and at the present moment I am inclined to think that if a man will only exercise himself in the proper way—if he will only take enough fresh air and expand his lungs freely—he may enjoy the inestimable blessing of perfect health all his days. You see me, madam. I don't suppose, for a man of five and sixty years, there is a stronger person in the whole of England.' Here little Mr Sarson puffed out his chest, and glared with his blue glasses at Mrs Rodney.

'I wish I did not feel so miserable. He is distinctly amusing,' thought Clarissa.

'Do you know how I keep my health good?' said Mr Sarson, now pushing back his chair. 'Thank you, no sweets; never touch 'em. Yes, I'll have another walnut.' He helped himself to two more, ate them, smacked his lips, and then continued. 'I make it a rule to go out every morning before breakfast, to walk a couple of miles to the highest point in the neighbourhood, and there inhale'——

'There do what?' said Mrs Rodney.

'Open my mouth, madam, and draw in full breaths of heaven's air. Thus I fill my lungs and go back invigorated and strong for the rest of the day. May I ask what is the greatest height in your neighbourhood?'

'I am sorry to say ours is rather a flat country,' said Mrs Rodney.

'Dear, dear, what a pity! I cannot stay long if that is the case. I inhale fresh air every morning, and each day I take three tablespoonfuls of cod-liver oil. By these means I keep myself in health. Do you happen to know the virtues of cod-liver oil, madam?'

'It is a medicine I have never taken,' replied Mrs Rodney. 'If you have finished, Mr Sarson, will you'——

'Ah! quite so. I have finished. I have had an excellent meal. Your pickles are delicious. But to revert to cod-liver oil, you will love it after a time. You begin by disliking it; but you assimilate it soon, and quite love it. I prefer it to any wine that was ever made. It is Nature's own medicine; that with fresh air properly inhaled will keep any one right.'

'Will you come into the drawing-room?' said Mrs Rodney. 'I think my husband would like to rest for a time after his supper; he will see you again later on. Clarissa, you can either go to your father or up to Janet.'

'I am dismissed,' thought Clarissa. 'Now, what will mother say?' She looked with despairing eyes as Mrs Rodney conducted Mr Sarson to the drawing-room. There he removed his blue glasses.

'Ah!' he said, 'the comfort these are to a man like

myself! It is necessary for me to spare my eyes, as I use them so very much over my specimens.'

'I am so glad you find my husband looking much as usual,' said Mrs Rodney.

'Well,' said Mr Sarson, 'to tell the honest truth, I never knew Rodney was ill.'

'What?' said Mrs Rodney. 'You never knew that my husband was ill?'

'Upon my word, no; it was remiss of me, no doubt.'

'But I wrote to tell you. When he was so very bad, and could not help you with your course of lectures, I had to write.'

'Madam, you will forgive me if I am frank. I invariably make it a rule never to open any letter which is in a female handwriting; I always consign such to the fire. Had I known that it was from Rodney's inestimable wife, one of the few ladies whom I respect, I might have made an exception; but I did not know it. Therefore I was unaware of his illness. I hinted as much to him, not wishing to pain him, when I was in the library.—Why, what is the matter, madam?'

'Then you,' began Mrs Rodney—'you didn't —— Forgive me, we thought you did.'

'Just like a woman,' said Mr Sarson; 'she can never speak straight. I didn't, and you thought I did. Pray, what didn't I do that you thought I did. Forgive me, I am irascible at times, and I have not yet had my cod-liver oil. Most soothing is cod-liver oil. What didn't I do that you thought I did?'

'All the same, I am sure you did,' said Mrs Rodney; 'it is like you. You were always generous. You don't know what my husband thinks of you.'

'If there is one thing more than another that I hate,' said Sarson, standing up at that moment, 'it is flattery. When a woman stoops to flattery —— Madam, you are my hostess, and I do not wish to say anything rude; but if you cannot explain yourself, will you change the conversation?'

Here little Mr Sarson placed himself on the middle of the hearth-rug, his legs slightly apart. Each hand was thrust deep into his trousers pockets; his hair stood up straighter and more wild-looking than ever; his blue eyes emitted sparks of indignation.

'I must speak out,' said Mrs Rodney; 'this mystery must be explained. Mr Sarson, you have a heart, although you like us to think you have not. You are one of my husband's oldest friends.'

'One of Rodney's oldest friends? I should think so. There is not a man on earth I hold in the same reverence as I do your husband. I have the greatest possible esteem for Rodney; he is a man, and worthy of the name. To be frank, it is women I dislike. I am tolerant of men.'

'Notwithstanding your words, which are the reverse of gracious,' said Mrs Rodney, 'I believe that you have a heart, and that you have acted in a very noble way. My dear husband has been at the point of death. A great London specialist, Sir John Carbery—— Ah! Mr Sarson, we are coming to the point now.'

'Bless me if I know what the woman means,' muttered Sarson under his breath. 'Sir John Carbery?' he said aloud. 'Never heard of him; who is he?'

'You never heard of Sir John Carbery, the great London physician?'

'Hate all doctors,' said Sarson. 'I believe in fresh

air properly inspirated, and cod-liver oil. Those are Nature's medicines; no one wants anything more.'

'Mr Sarson, Sir John Carbery came here to see my husband. His fee was thirty-five guineas. We could not afford it. We were under the impression that you'——

'That I what, madam?'

'That you—paid it.'

'Bless me!' said Mr Sarson. He took out his handkerchief and blew his nose fiercely. He blew it two or three times, then he put on his glasses again. 'The fire makes a glare,' he said, 'bad for the eyes. You thought that?' he said then slowly. 'You thought wrong, that's all. Not that I wouldn't have done it to save Rodney. I'd have given my last shilling; but I didn't know of his illness. Had I known, I would have sent him down a dozen bottles of the best cod-liver oil, and money to pay for a carriage to take him to some place of high elevation in the neighbourhood, so that he could fill his lungs with fresh air. You are mistaken, madam, if you think I was your good angel on that occasion.'

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS NONENTITY.

CLARISSA knew nothing of what Mr Sarson had confided to her mother. She slept badly that night, and felt that her own position was getting worse and worse. In the morning she arose looking almost haggard; her head ached and she was tired.

Janet was now so well that she was able to come downstairs again, and the two sisters saw their mother for the first time, since the night before, at the breakfast-table.

Mrs Rodney looked somewhat severe; her lips were pursed up—a sure sign, as the girls knew, that she was not to be interfered with. Mr Sarson was present, and was very gloomy and silent. From his manner to Janet and Clarissa, he evidently thought their appearance in the room an offence to his dignity. As soon as he had concluded the meal, which he ate very fast, and with his blue glasses on, he turned his back to them, walked to the window, and stood looking out.

Mrs Rodney spoke. 'Janet,' she said, 'you are not well enough to go out to-day. Clarissa, you and I will

go to church at the usual hour.—Mr Sarson, will you accompany us, or will you stay with my husband?'

'I will stay with Rodney, if you have no objection,' was Mr Sarson's reply; and then Mrs Rodney and Clarissa left the room.

Poor Janet was obliged to remain, and very uncomfortable did she feel. One of Mrs Rodney's pet economies was in the matter of coals. However severe the weather, she only allowed fires in a certain number of rooms; and Janet knew that if she was to keep warm she must remain in the dining-room. Even there the fire was not too generous; it was well slacked down after breakfast, and there was only a glow of heat from its heart, the greater part of its surface being black and uninviting.

Janet drew a chair forward and sat gazing into the fire. She was thinking a great deal of Clarissa, and wondering hard how she was to get out of her difficulty. Presently she heard her mother and sister come downstairs; they stood for a moment in the hall, then the door was opened and closed behind them, and their steps were heard going down the street. The steps died away. Janet turned her anxious, pretty blue eyes in the direction of the two tall windows. In one of them stood the little Professor George Sarson; he was a great man at University College, London—much esteemed, his word hung upon, his utterances listened to with intense respect. Students crowded to hear him; they loved what he had to tell them, they revered him for the marvellous knowledge which lay in his curious brain. At that instant, however, little Janet by no means loved him.

'He is keeping out the light,' she said to herself.

'I can't read my new story-book. I wish he would go away; he makes me uncomfortable.'

And just as this thought came to her, Professor Sarson wheeled quickly round, stared full at the child, and came a step or two towards her. 'Little girl,' he said.

'Yes, sir,' replied Janet, springing to her feet.

'How old are you?'

'Ten years old,' answered Janet, colouring and looking down.

'Ten? Ah!' said the Professor, 'I don't mind girls of that age; they are scarcely girls at all.'

'But, if you please, I am a girl,' said Janet with some indignation.

'Don't contradict me,' said Mr Sarson; 'I cannot endure it even from a man-student, let alone from a mite who is neither a girl nor a woman, simply a nonentity.'

Janet coloured painfully, and tears filled her eyes.

Mr Sarson, who was not wearing his blue spectacles at that moment, fixed his own eyes, as blue and bluer, on the blue eyes of the child and saw the tears.

'Come, come,' he said. 'I am a rough old bear—yes, I know I am; but I don't mean to hurt you. I want to ask you a question. Are you afraid of me?'

'Oh no; only you said what wasn't true,' said Janet.

'Come, I like that—I like plain speaking. Your mother flattered me abominably last night—abominably. I don't mind—I quite enjoy—the man or woman or nonentity who gives me a slap in the face. Give me another blow now—a good one while you are about it. Come!' Here Mr Sarson broke into a ringing laugh

which was quite gay, and so unexpected that Janet felt more alarmed than ever. 'Come,' he said. He drew a chair forward and sat down. 'What's the next slap, little Nonentity?'

'I won't talk to you if you call me that,' said Janet.

'Better and better. You are quite refreshing. It is an awful pity you are not a boy; you would make a very good sort. Sturdy little limbs too.' Here he took one of Janet's hands; he held the little hand between both his own and stroked it quite softly.

'Once I had a pet cat,' he said; 'a kitten. I loved it. Ridiculous as it sounds, I did. You need not sneer, little Miss Pussy. It was something like you —soft, round, prettily marked.'

'I am not marked,' said Janet; 'one would think I was a cat myself.'

'Be thankful if you are ever half as good.'

'That I will not stand,' said Janet. She struggled to get up; but, to her immense surprise and almost terror, Mr Sarson now drew her close to him.

'You are very like a pussy,' he said, 'very like;' and he put up his hand and stroked her long, very thick brown hair. 'Do you know,' he continued, 'I like you, little Miss Nonentity. Your mother — I would rather not talk to her; your elder sister—to be frank, I have scarcely noticed her. I observed that a young girl was in the room, but that is all. You, little Miss Nonentity, are quite refreshing. Unfortunately for yourself, you won't be so long; in a year or two you will have outgrown the kitten period, and be a commonplace, tiresome, everyday girl.'

'Thank you,' said Janet.

'Come, will you sit on my lap? I want to talk to you.'

'I'd rather not.'

'You are the first little nonentity that ever sat there. My cat was fond of sitting on my knee. Come!'—and before Janet could help it, she found herself lifted on to Mr Sarson's lap. He still held her hand, which he stroked; his blue eyes looked very kindly into hers. 'Tell me about your father,' he said. 'Upon my word, I could not sleep last night. That mother of yours told me a queer story.'

'Did she? Did she tell you?' said Janet. 'Did she tell you that'——

'Now, little Nonentity, if you speak in that strain, off my lap you go. You remind me exactly of your mother. She said that I did what I did, and other extraordinary statements of the same sort. If you will speak out I will listen; but if not, off my lap and out of the room you'll go.'

'I shall be very glad to get off your lap,' said Janet with dignity; 'and I don't think you could turn me out of the room, seeing it is father's and mother's room, and they wish me to sit here.'

'Well answered! Capital!' said Sarson. 'You are quite a dear little nonen—— You dislike that word? Well, I'll try and not call it to you. Now, look me in the face.' Here he jerked Janet's small face round and looked full into her eyes. 'What is that story about a doctor coming down here and seeing your father—a great London swell, and—and the supposition getting into your mother's head that *I* paid him? Do you know anything about it?'

'I know all about it,' said Janet. 'I know more

than mother does.' Here she coloured painfully and then turned white.

'Then you are just exactly the little nonentity for me—just exactly. You shall tell me the entire tale.'

'I wonder if I might,' thought Janet. 'It would save Clare, and I'd have saved her. Oh dear! oh dear!'

Her heart beat fast; words trembled on her lips. She looked so full and so earnestly into Mr Sarson's face that his own face grew grave and almost anxious.

'I wish you were a boy,' he said; and he had scarcely uttered the words, and Janet had just barely made up her mind to let out the truth with a rush, when steps were heard—feeble, frail, but nevertheless unmistakable — in the hall outside, and Professor Rodney himself came in.

No one could look more astonished than Professor Rodney when he saw Janet seated on Professor Sarson's lap; and no one could have been more disgusted than Professor Sarson was to find himself in this position.

He jumped up like a shot, almost tumbling poor Janet to the floor. He went forward to the other professor and held out his hand.

'Just having a chat with your little nonentity.'

'My little what?' said Mr Rodney.

'That little creature over there.' Mr Sarson wished to avoid the obnoxious word 'girl.' 'Nice little creature,' said Sarson; 'very nice. Well, and are you ready for our talk?—Another time I'll have a conversation with you, little pussy.' Here he nodded in a friendly way to Janet, and the two professors left the room together.

Janet rubbed her cheeks.

'Horrid man!' she said under her breath. 'So I am a nonentity, and a pussy, and a creature. I never was talked to so rudely before; and yet I wish he had stayed. I believe I could have helped Clare. I believe I could. Oh, my darling Clare! It was horrid sitting on his lap; and yet he has nice eyes. They are so very blue, and when he smiled they were like two little stars in his head; and, oh dear! what a funny laugh he had. It came so sudden it made me jump; but I do hate being called a nonentity. I wonder what a nonentity means. I'll ask Clare when she comes in. I wonder, too, when I'll see him again, and if I can tell him, and if he'll put things straight. He had such kind eyes. Isn't it funny that Clare and I should both have an old gentleman of our own—I Professor Sarson, and Clare Mr Thomas Jenkins? Oh, it is funny; but I hate being called a pussy-cat and a creature. I hate it even worse than being Miss Nonentity.'

All that day Janet waited with a curious impatience for another interview with Mr Sarson; but Sarson, who had come on special business to see his great friend Professor Rodney, had evidently forgotten her existence. He now invariably wore his blue glasses in the presence of Mrs Rodney and Clarissa; and Janet wondered if he even saw her.

'For I am small, and it's plain that most people think I am worth very little,' thought the child; 'but I won't say anything to dear, dear Clare until I can really help her.'

After dinner Mrs Rodney opened the missionary-box; she opened it in the presence of both girls.

Janet felt herself turning faint and almost sick; she suddenly tumbled to her feet.

'What is the matter, Janet?' asked her mother. 'Why are you leaving the room? What is wrong, my dear?'

'Nothing. I mean I don't know. I'd like to go and lie down for a minute or two.'

'That child is not well,' said Mrs Rodney, looking at Clarissa. 'I hope she is not sickening for anything; she seemed better this morning.'

'Oh, she is much better, mother,' said Clarissa. 'I will go up and sit with her if you like. Perhaps I had better light the fire in our room?'

'You can do so,' said Mrs Rodney; 'and if she is tired she need not come downstairs again to-day. But, first, will you help me with this money? Just get a sheet of paper and a pencil and jot down the amount contained in the box. I must send some postal-orders for the amount to the Society to-morrow. We ought to have—let me see—four pounds eight shillings and some pence in the box. I have the exact amount in my note-book. Hand me my note-book, Clarissa.'

Clarissa walked across the big dining-room; she put her hand on her mother's writing-table. The note-book stood as a rule on the top of all the others; it was a little book, and much used. With a deft movement, and actuated by a feeling of despair, Clarissa slipped the note-book into her pocket. She looked around her.

'Why don't you bring it to me?' said her mother, who had her back to her and of course had not observed the action.

'I cannot find it, mother,' said the miserable girl. She came back again and sat down opposite to her mother.

'Well, it doesn't much matter. I remember the exact sum,' said Mrs Rodney; 'four pounds eight shillings and fivepence. Yes, I remember quite well; I put five loose coppers in during the week, for your father was getting so much better and I did not absolutely require them for my housekeeping. It was a trifling offering, but given in the spirit in which all charity ought to be given. Now, let me count.'

Mrs Rodney counted and counted.

Clarissa pretended to be engaged with a book. Her heart was beating fast, but her face looked pale and as usual. She had to put such a tremendous strain on herself that she did not think her mother would notice anything unusual.

'Clarissa,' said Mrs Rodney's voice presently, 'will you count this up?'

Clarissa did so.

'What do you make the sum to be?' said Mrs Rodney.

'Three pounds eight and tenpence,' said Clarissa.

'Yes, that is what I make it too,' said Mrs Rodney. 'Then there is no doubt. Some one has been at this box, some one has been tampering with it. A sovereign has gone.'

'Oh, mother, are you sure?' said poor Clarissa.

'Sure? I am certain. I never make mistakes. I have the exact sum entered in my note-book. Stay, I will find it; it was here this morning.'

Mrs Rodney went to her table and hunted in vain

for the book. Clarissa got up and pretended to help her.

'Whoever took the sovereign has stolen the note-book,' said Mrs Rodney. 'I must question all the servants. Send them to me at once.'

'But two of them are not in the house, you know, mother; they have gone out.'

'So they have; it is most annoying—most terribly annoying.'

'Perhaps you made a mistake, mother, in the amount.'

'Don't be so silly; as if I could make a mistake in a whole sovereign. This is more than annoying; it is terrible. We have a thief in our midst. Well, I shall say nothing until they return, and then each of them must be spoken to in turn; and unless the thief confesses they shall all go. I won't keep servants whom I cannot fully trust. This must have been done during your father's illness. Give me the box, Clare; I must look at it.'

Mrs Rodney carefully examined the missionary-box; but although Clare had broken it open on that terribly auspicious day, some time ago now, she had done it so well that there was not a trace of the damage visible. She had simply lifted the little roof and glued it back again in its place.

Mrs Rodney could see nothing wrong with the box.

'It is most annoying,' she said. 'I am vexed. I cannot send this sum to London until the lost sovereign is found. Don't sit staring at me any longer, Clare; go up to your sister.'

Never in all her life had Clarissa been more pleased to leave a room than she was then. She dashed up-

stairs, her knees trembling, her hands shaking. She ran into her own bedroom, where Janet was lying on the bed, pink spots on her cheeks.

'Oh, Clare! Clare! what is the matter?' said the child.

'Where are the matches?' said Clarissa in a sort of strangled voice. 'Mother says you may have a fire.'

'Oh, don't mind the fire now. Do—do tell me what has happened.'

Clarissa struck a match, applied it to the fire already laid in the grate, and the next instant took the note-book out of her pocket and thrust it between the bars.

'It is our only chance — our only chance. Oh, Janey! oh, Janey! I am such a wicked, wicked girl;' and she rushed over to where little Janet was curled up in the bed, flung her arms round her sister's neck, and burst into a passion of weeping.

'What have you done?' said Janet, when at last the elder girl could find her voice.

'Burnt mother's note-book.'

'Oh, Clare! Why? Why?'

'It is our only chance. She cannot prove anything without the note-book as witness. It came into my head at the last desperate moment. Father will be sure to tell her that she must not accuse any one if she has only her memory to trust to. Mother knows that her memory is by no means infallible. It will save us, and I had to do it; but, oh! I told a lie, and I hid it in her presence; and I am wicked—so wicked that it is past bearing. I wonder if God will ever, ever forgive me.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

'DROSS.'

THINGS turned out something as Clarissa expected. Mrs Rodney on the following morning spoke to her husband about the missionary-box, and the amount which she had found therein. He was a very grave, quiet, just sort of man. He had an excellent memory, whereas Mrs Rodney's was the burden of her life; it was so uncertain, so undependable. Mr Rodney examined the box, could find no trace of its ever having been tampered with, and immediately told his wife that until she could find her own note-book she ought not honestly to accuse any one.

'It is a very grave thing to accuse a person of theft,' he said. 'Our servants have been with us for some time, and are all, as far as we can tell, trustworthy. You know, Miriam, you cannot always trust your own memory; it is far more likely that you made a mistake in the amount than that any one would dare break open the box and take out a sovereign.'

So Mrs Rodney—although by no means satisfied, and quite sure in her own mind that on this particular occasion she was right—was obliged for the time at

least to submit. She could not even question the servants, according to her husband's way of thinking; but she refused to send up the money to the Missionary Society until, as she herself expressed it, she found her lost note-book. But, of course, search as she would she could not find the book, which poor Clarissa in despair had thrust into the flames.

Clarissa now was distinctly unhappy. She could scarcely attend to her work at school, so *distrait* and nervous was she; and Janet, who was devoted to her elder sister, became quite unhappy about her.

'I could even bear being called "Little Nonentity" and "Pussy" for her sake,' thought the child. 'I do wish I could get some opportunity to talk to Mr Sarson.'

But Sarson, ashamed doubtless of his penchant for the child, took little or no notice of her during the remainder of his stay; and, as he himself expressed it, the locality being so flat he was obliged to hasten his departure. He left Upton early on Tuesday morning, and only bade good-bye to his friend Rodney and Mrs Rodney. Just as he was getting into the carriage to drive to the station, however, a memory seemed to assail him.

'By the way,' he said—he ran back and addressed Mrs Rodney—'tell Little Nonentity that if any'——

'I fail to understand,' said Mrs Rodney. 'Tell whom?'

'Oh! your youngest little creature—I really would rather not call her a girl; it is such a pity she is not a boy; but tell her that if at any time George Sarson can do her a kindness he will be very glad to do so. She is a nice, straightforward, honest little soul;

and now good-bye, good-bye. Don't forget cod-liver oil, and fresh air properly inspirated daily for your husband.'

Professor Sarson took his leave; and when she came home that afternoon Mrs Rodney delivered his message to Janet. 'A most extraordinary man,' she said; 'think no more about it, child. I am inclined to believe that the poor Professor is not all there in some respects.'

'Oh, he is very much all there, mother,' replied Janet; and she coloured and her eyes grew bright.

Mrs Rodney herself quickly forgot the Professor's queer words; but Janet pondered them in her heart. They were to bear fruit by-and-by. Meanwhile, the visit from the great doctor from London filled all the mother's thoughts. He was to come early the following morning, when Clarissa would, of course, be at school; she was glad of this, as she did not want to face him. It now wanted but five days to the date when she had faithfully promised that the great London specialist should receive his money.

'Five days!' thought Clarissa. 'God only knows what will happen at the end of that time.' She was so miserable she could scarcely attend to her work. Examinations were going on, for Christmas was not far off; and Clarissa was certainly by no means adding to her reputation as the winner of the Randall Scholarship. She was sent down in class day after day, she received anything but full marks for the different subjects under examination; and people who looked at her and saw how pale her face was and how strained the light in her eyes, were convinced that, clever girl as she was, she was studying too hard.

Martha was now rapidly rising in the school. It is a sad fact of our human natures that a very poor girl seldom gets the same amount of notice and consideration that the rich girl gets. Martha in her unsuitable but handsome clothes, driving to school in her pretty pony-carriage, was a totally different person from the poor Martha Moore who walked nearly double the distance, who wore the very shabbiest of clothes in the whole school, who looked underfed and terribly anxious.

Martha was now pronounced to be as clever as Clarissa, if not cleverer; and there were even one or two girls who were heard to say that they heartily wished she had won the scholarship.

'It seems thrown away on Miss Rodney,' they said one to the other. 'That cleverness of hers must have been just a spurt. She will take a very low place in the examinations, and all the professors and mistresses will be disappointed.'

On the day when Sir John Carbery paid his second visit, Clarissa's head ached so badly that it was with the utmost difficulty she could attend to her work at all. She had told her mother in the morning that she would stay at school for dinner, and Mrs Rodney had said it was the best thing to do; but although Clarissa paid her shilling for the meal she could not touch it, and more than one of her companions asked her if she were ill.

Martha, in the same class, who always stayed to dinner, looked at her with a curious mingling of affection, compassion, and contempt. Martha's character was changing a great deal; prosperity was not improving her. It was quite true what Clarissa

thought, she was not anything like as sympathetic as when she herself was poor and wanted even the comforts of a good meal.

More and more as the day proceeded did Clarissa think of the terrible fate which lay before her. What was she to do when the 20th arrived? She would have no money to send Sir John Carbery. He would write, perhaps, to her father, demanding his money.

'I wonder I have not courage to go back and see him, and ask him to have a little patience,' she thought; but she knew that she had not the courage—it seemed to her that all her honour was at stake. 'What shall I do?' she thought.

As she was leaving the school an idea suddenly came to her. Suppose she saw one of the Governors, suppose she begged of him to let her have the money instead of the education? 'I might let him know that I am terribly anxious; that it is most vital for the whole happiness of my life that I should have for this one year the forty pounds instead of lessons,' thought the girl.

Accordingly, she made up her mind to go and see Mr Redcliffe, a stout, prosperous old gentleman who lived in a large square called St John's Square near by.

Martha waited for her for a moment. 'Will you come home with me?' she said. 'Uncle Tom is away, and mother and I intend to have a pleasant evening, quite in the old style. We shall dine in the big new dining-room; but we will be in my dear little sitting-room afterwards. There won't be a word said about that terrible old Mrs Jenkins. Do come, Clare! We should like so much to have you.'

But Clarissa assured her friend that she could not go with her that day; and accordingly, Martha—slightly offended, and inclined to think that Clarissa was not nearly as nice as she used to be—stepped into her pony-carriage and took up the reins. She was already learning to drive quite nicely, and soon dashed out of sight.

'It's horrid to see her with all those luxuries,' thought Clarissa, 'whereas I want, oh! such a little to make me perfectly happy.' She felt desperate now; the knowledge that she had burnt her mother's note-book, that she had told lie after lie, tended to depress her to the last degree. 'I always did think myself a good girl,' she thought; 'not perfect, of course, but good in the ordinary sense—honourable at least, at least not a liar, at least not a thief. Oh! what is to become of me? And dear, darling little Janet is dragged down by me too. Oh! I thought I was doing right, and it seemed so important; but I suppose I was doing wrong, very wrong, all the time.'

She had now reached Mr Redcliffe's house. She went up the heavy, ponderous steps, stood under the stone portico, and rung the bell. A footman in livery opened the door.

'Is Mr Redcliffe in?' asked Clarissa.

'He is in, miss,' replied the man; 'but I do not know if he can see any one.'

'I want to see him very badly,' said Clarissa, and she raised her pretty dark eyes and fixed them pleadingly on the wooden face of the servant. He was not proof against the look of suffering in Clarissa's eyes.

'Perhaps, miss,' he said, 'if you were to give your name'——

'Oh yes,' she answered eagerly; 'say Miss Rodney —Miss Clarissa Rodney, the winner of the Randall Scholarship.'

The servant asked Clarissa to step into the hall. He then went along a passage; there was a short delay, and in a moment's time he came back and motioned to the girl to follow him. He took her into a large, luxuriously furnished library. There were books from ceiling to floor; the furniture was of heavy, carved oak; there was a rich Turkey carpet on the floor. In the distance blazed a great fire, and on the hearth stood a tall man with a heavy face and white hair.

'I am glad to see you, Miss Rodney,' he said. He came forward and held out his hand. 'Will you sit down, please?'

'I came to speak to you about the scholarship,' began Clarissa.

'Ah! yes,' he answered, 'quite so; but the advantages will not begin until next term. The holidays will commence in three weeks' time; and when the school re-opens in January you will find yourself in a very enviable position. You will have lessons from the very best masters in all those things which you like most. I quite envy you your career. No anxiety with regard to fees, and special attention given to your education from every point of view.'

'Thank you,' said Clarissa. She stood up and her face got very white. 'May I trust you?' she said suddenly.

'Trust me?' said Mr Redcliffe. He was a kind-

hearted man; he dropped into a chair. 'Why, certainly, young lady,' he said; 'not only as the winner of the scholarship, but as the daughter of your most highly-respected father you have my sympathy and respect.'

'You would not respect me if you knew,' she began.

'I should not respect you?'

'Oh! no, no!' said Clarissa. 'I did not mean to say those words. I want to ask you a straightforward question.'

'Take your time, take your time, my dear; but, first of all, tell me how is your father? I was gratified to hear yesterday that he is fast recovering.'

'Yes, he is much better,' said Clarissa.

'He has had a marvellous recovery. I understood from Bennett that the case was practically hopeless; but that wonderful man, Sir John Carbery, has saved another life. I cannot tell you what cures he has effected. He has saved a most valuable life in this instance.'

'He has indeed,' said Clarissa; and just for a moment she thought, 'All that I have done was worth while;' but she soon checked the feeling. 'Sir John has come to see father again to-day,' she said. 'I believe he will be very much pleased with him.'

'Quite so,' said Mr Redcliffe. He began to fidget; he had a good deal to do, and wished Clarissa would come to the point.

She saw this desire in his face, and continued abruptly, 'I have come here to beg for a very great favour.'

'Well, well,' said Mr Redcliffe, 'if in my power, of course—if in my power.'

'It must be in your power, sir. You are one of the Governors of the school.'

'Any special favour from any special teacher? Certainly; all that I can do for the winner of the Randall Scholarship.'

'But it is not that, sir; it is something'——

'Well, speak, my dear young lady.'

'Would you greatly mind, for one year—instead of giving me lessons at the school—letting me have the forty pounds which the scholarship is worth?'

'Would I greatly mind'—— began Mr Redcliffe after a pause. 'Will you favour me, Miss Rodney, by repeating that remark again?'

Clarissa found it much more difficult to say the words the second time than the first. Mr Redcliffe nodded his head at each word that fell from her lips.

'I understand,' he said, 'that you want the money instead of the tuition?'

'Yes, that is it. Do you think it would be possible to—to oblige me?'

'Your request is a very extraordinary one—very extraordinary indeed. Very; in my opinion, painful. What does this mean?'

'It means exactly what I say, Mr Redcliffe.'

'And you prefer money to learning—you who have won the scholarship, the greatest prize the school contains, prefer just money—dross—to learning? Do I hear aright?'

'It is not exactly dross to me,' said Clarissa, stung

by this word. 'It means a great deal. I—remember I am speaking in confidence, and I trust you not to betray me—I owe the money.'

'Oh, indeed.' Mr Redcliffe was thoroughly angry now. 'I imagined,' he said, 'that the girl who won the Randall Scholarship was a person of—well, in short, a person who deserved it, a person whose character was above reproach. You think to get out of a scrape by asking me to appropriate money meant to encourage learning, to encourage excellence of character and conduct—to appropriate such money to a base end. Miss Rodney, I am surprised and pained; but, even if I were not surprised and pained, you ask for what is out of my power to give. I am only one of the Governors who hold this trust for the good of the school. None of us could possibly accede to your request, for it is absolutely outside the terms of the trust money which supplies the fund for the scholarship.'

'Then you have answered me,' said Clarissa. 'I thought I would try, that is all.'

She got up; her face was very white. She saw that Mr Redcliffe, far from understanding her, thought very badly of her; she turned and walked towards the door. He stepped across the room and held it open.

'You will not betray me?' she said, raising her eyes to his face.

'I have said I would not; but I am pained and disappointed.'

'So am I,' said poor Clarissa.

This last remark of hers seemed to finish the business as far as Mr Redcliffe was concerned. An

angry flush mounted to his brow; he almost slammed the door as Clarissa passed out.

'How mistaken one is in those girls,' he said to himself. 'Really the world seems to get worse and worse. Of all people, I should not have thought that Rodney's daughter would require money for herself. And to get her out of debt! Debt! A girl of that age! Probably she has been buying finery. Sickening! sickening!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WAY OUT.

IT was just as Clarissa was entering the house that an idea came to her which promised immediate relief. It came so suddenly and unexpectedly that she nearly jumped with a sense of thankfulness. She ran into the house, therefore, her spirits once more restored, and eagerly questioned her mother as to what Sir John Carbery had said.

'He gave an admirable report, I am thankful to say, darling; an admirable report. Your dear father is on the road to complete recovery. He must be very careful for some weeks longer; but there is nothing to prevent his resuming his professional duties at the beginning of next term. Oh! this is a relief! How thankful I am!'

Just for a wild moment it came into Clarissa's head there and then to confess all. 'If I tell mother that because I did as I did my darling father's life is spared, surely, surely she will forgive me?' thought the girl. But even as the thought came to her she noticed the hard look returning to her mother's face.

'We must be very careful,' said Mrs Rodney; 'and no luxuries can be permitted in the establishment

for some time. The extraordinary circumstance of how Sir John is paid worries your father and me not a little. It is quite plain that Mr Sarson knew nothing whatever about it, and your father cannot think which of his other friends has put him under such a great obligation.

'But, surely, mother,' said Clarissa, 'father must be thankful that Sir John Carbery came?'

'Thankful? Of course he is, my dear. If Sir John had not come and ordered, just in the nick of time, the special treatment which he did order, your dear, dear father—— Clarissa, my love, I cannot go on.' Tears filled Mrs Rodney's eyes.

Clarissa longed to rush to her mother, fling her arms round her neck and kiss her; but she felt herself unworthy.

'I am a thief, and I have told lies,' she thought. 'Until I can, at any rate, tell the truth to mother I dare not be affectionate.' So she went out of the room, suppressing the desire to go into her father's study and congratulate him on the doctor's good report. She went slowly, very slowly upstairs.

'Clarissa is scarcely improving,' thought Mrs Rodney, standing still for a moment after her daughter had left her; 'and how quietly she takes things. Now, I always did think that Clare was passionately fond of her father. I thought my news would have delighted her; one never can tell what one's girls will turn into. Dear! dear! there are many anxieties in life.'

Meanwhile Clarissa reached her bedroom. She found Janet, as usual, waiting for her. Janet had heard the good news, and her eyes were sparkling; and

had Clarissa not been in such trouble the little sister would have been very happy.

Clarissa ran into the bedroom, took hold of Janet's hands and squeezed them.

'I am nearly mad!' she said; 'but, oh! I know all about father. Listen, Janet—you have been in my secret all along—I have found a way out.'

'A way out? What do you mean?'

'Why, of course, what a silly girl I have been! I shall sell Mr Jenkins's ring. I could never wear it. It will probably fetch quite as much money as I want. I shall go straight to the jeweller in the High Street —Richardson—and ask him what he will give me for it.'

'But—does it seem kind?' said little Janet.

'Kind?' repeated Clarissa, 'kind? It doesn't matter whether it is kind or not. It was doubtless given to me as a way out of my trouble. I shall sell it this very night. Don't keep me, Janey. I only trust I shall get enough for it!'

So Clarissa unlocked her chest of drawers, took out the little morocco case, slipped it into her pocket, and ran downstairs.

'Going out again, my dear?' called her mother after her. 'I had hoped you would sit with your father for a little.'

'So I will when I come back, mother; and I won't be very long,' replied Clarissa. She walked rapidly; her heart was beating in great throbs, and her cheeks were flushed. She only trusted that Mr Richardson himself would be in, and that no special friend of the family would be in the shop when she entered it.

he knew at once that the two pearls in the centre of the ring were worth a considerable sum of money.

'Where did you get this, miss?' he asked.

Clarissa was somewhat surprised at the question. 'It was given to me,' she said; 'it is my own, to do what I like with. I am Professor Rodney's daughter.'

'Oh, indeed!' said the man. 'Professor Rodney's daughter? Then that makes it quite safe. You will forgive my asking what seemed like an impertinent question, Miss Rodney; but in purchasing articles of this sort we tradespeople cannot be too careful. I myself, miss, once gave a large sum of money for a stolen article, which, of course, I was obliged in the end to return. Our trade, miss, behoves us to be very careful; but in your case'——

'The ring is absolutely mine,' said Clarissa. 'I cannot tell you any more. If you will not trust me I will take it to'——

'I quite trust you, miss; your father's name is sufficient guarantee.'

'You will not mention anything about it to my father?'

'Well, miss, is it likely? I only wished to be assured that you came by it honestly.'

Poor Clarissa's face flamed with an angry red. A sharp retort rose to her lips; but she repressed it.

'After all I am not honest,' she thought. 'I stole that sovereign, and told mother that lie about it.'

The jeweller now took the ring up to the light. He examined it carefully.

'You really wish to part with it, miss?' he said.

'I really do.'

'Then there is a small test which I must apply—

nothing to injure the ring in the very least, but in order to make all safe.'

'Will you apply it then?' said Clarissa.

Richardson went into the back part of the shop. He was absent for a minute or two, then he returned.

'The ring is as valuable as I thought it was. What do you want for it, miss?'

'Oh, as much as you can give.'

'Perhaps, miss, you would like to borrow a small sum on the ring, which you could pay back at your convenience? I would be willing to lend you ten pounds, for instance.'

'Oh! that would be no use at all. I want about forty pounds, please.'

The jeweller in reality would have given fifty pounds for the ring; but being true to the instincts of his trade, he pretended to be rather astonished at Clarissa's demand.

'That is a very large sum indeed,' he said. 'I don't know that I should be justified in giving more than thirty.'

'Then, in that case, I must take the ring away,' said Clarissa. 'Less than forty pounds will be of no use to me.'—'For I may have to go to town in order to pay Sir John Carbery,' she thought.

The jeweller hummed and hawed. In the end he agreed to Clarissa's demand, and she left the shop, trembling and giddy, with forty pounds in gold and notes in her pocket.

The ring, meanwhile—Thomas Jenkins's ring—reposed in Richardson's shop.

CHAPTER XXV.

VELVET AND BROCADE.

HERE was great excitement at Jenkins Manor. The time was spring — the bright, fresh spring of the year—the April flowers were out in Jenkins's garden; the daffodils, the primroses, the violets, the hyacinths, they bloomed in masses in the beds. There was nothing, however, wonderful about that, and Martha took small pleasure in the gay garden. The flowering plants were put in every week by the gardener, and taken away as their bloom went off, to be supplemented by fresh ones in fresh beauty. The lawns were mown to the utmost smoothness; and Jenkins was busy having one of the most perfect tennis-lawns laid down. He wished to be in the fashion; he wished, as he said to Martha, to entertain his young friends.

On this particular day, being the 25th of April, there was to be the first large party which Thomas Jenkins had ever given. Mrs Moore had, of course, sent out the invitations, and every girl whom Martha knew was asked to be present. Jenkins himself also knew a few people in the town—for the rich will always be called upon wherever they happen to settle.

He was ill at ease with these gentlemen; but, all the same, he was proud of their acquaintance. He called them by their surnames without attaching any prefix; he talked loudly before them of his wealth and of his future prospects; he assured them one by one that he had made his little pile, and his little pile was not so little after all.

'It is affectation to call it little,' Jenkins was heard to say; 'it is a big pile—very big.' And then he would strut about and puff out his chest, and look, in Martha's opinion, more intolerably vulgar than ever.

He was used to his valet now, and submitted to his ministrations; he was also used to his big red-brick house, and to his garden with its showy flower-beds, and to his large green-houses, and to all the tokens of his wealth. He had learned to enjoy his meals, to be particular with regard to the viands which appeared on his table. He recklessly ordered suit after suit of magnificent clothes from his tailor in London, and never observed when Augustus secretly purloined these suits and sent them back to London, to receive considerable sums of money for them. Augustus was in league with the head-waiter at the 'George' Hotel, and between them they were making quite a nice income out of Jenkins.

But now his great triumph was about to take place. He was in a wild state of excitement; he burst into the room where Martha and her mother were busily decorating and arranging flowers.

'Ha! Martha,' he called out, 'you 'll be pleased to hear that Rodney is coming.'

'The Professor?' said Martha in a tone almost of awe, for she hated her uncle's familiarity with these

people, who were in reality so much above him in the social scale.

'Yes,' he retorted, annoyed at her tone. 'Rodney—Rodney is coming. I wasn't sure of him, so I called round to-day to find out. But he is coming, and so is that fine madam his wife—they'll both be present—and my little friend Clarissa too. I'd have liked to ask the youngest child; but when I suggested it the mother snapped me up. An unpleasant woman—don't like her at all.—Polly, I say, come here.' He took his sister by the arm and led her out of the room.

Martha remained behind. She put her hand to her forehead. 'Such a lot of wealth,' she said under her breath. 'Magnificence everywhere—all that the heart could wish; and yet—— Oh! I understand what it means to have abundance, and yet leanness in the soul. I am not half as nice a girl as I used to be. I have taken all the bad out of these riches, and none of the good. Well, there is no help for it now; I suppose I must go on. But why do I hate poor Uncle Tom when he is trying to please me and to do so much for me?'

Just at this moment Mrs Moore returned. 'Martha,' she said, 'your uncle wishes you to wear a particular dress which is coming from town this evening.'

'Oh, mother!' said Martha, with a face of dismay, 'may I not wear my white silk? I really do not wish to wear anything else. I told Clare only yesterday that I would be as simply dressed as possible.'

'You cannot help it, my love,' said Mrs Moore. 'Your uncle has taken it into his head that you are in a sort of way 'coming out' this evening. Of course,

not really, dear; but we must humour him. He is very fractious about something, I cannot tell what; and he wants you to wear the dress which is coming from town.'

'He did not happen to mention what sort it was?'

'No, he would not tell me; he said you'd be off your head with joy when you saw it. The fact is, dear —although you don't mean it—you worry your dear uncle very considerably. You have a sort of reproving air to him on all occasions, which my poor dear Tom naturally resents.'

'I try not to, mother; but I always told you the experiment would not really work. I did what I did for your sake, but'——

'Well, darling, there is no use in fretting now. Just try to go on doing your very utmost to please him for my sake.'

Martha wiped away a tear, and went out into the garden. Just then she saw Clarissa coming across the grass to meet her. Clarissa looked much better; the anxious look had completely vanished from her face. She had once again returned with zeal to her studies. Once again she was pleasing the Directors of the day-school company; once again she was held up before the other girls as one possessed of genius, of very marked talent. Her father helped her, and the other professors who attended the school brought her forward; and her expenses in all possible ways were met, and her heart was light. She had paid Sir John Carbery in full; she had sent him the money in notes in a sealed and registered packet, and had begged of him to acknowledge the amount to the care of the post-office. And she had received his acknowledgment in a

very prettily worded letter, and further, an assurance from him that if her father needed his services at any time he would be happy to give them gratis. 'For the sake of his brave young daughter,' wrote Sir John Carbery in conclusion.

Clarissa read this letter, and cried over it and kissed it, and put it away amongst her treasures. 'In the place of my pearl ring,' she thought. 'Oh, what a blessed, blessed exchange!'

The sovereign, however, which had been stolen from the missionary-box was not yet returned; Clarissa kept it until the instant arrived when she might safely put it back. But Mrs Rodney, altogether disgusted by the firm belief that there was a thief in their midst, had for a long time refused to allow the missionary-box to stand in its accustomed place. She blamed her husband for not allowing her to prosecute her inquiries with regard to the stolen sovereign; but, being always met by the one response, 'When you find your note-book it will be time to make others unhappy,' she was obliged to allow the whole affair to sink out of sight. She had sent the money, however, to the Missionary Society, less the one sovereign which Clarissa had taken; and Clarissa and Janet both hoped that soon the little missionary-box would appear in its old position, and that Clarissa could pay back her debt.

Clarissa looked very bright now; she was dressed becomingly, and she ran up to Martha and held out both her hands. 'What fun to see you,' she said. 'What fun it all is! Dear Mr Jenkins has just been round at our house; and, do you know, even mother is coming. Father insisted on it. Father is so much

interested in Mr Jenkins; he says he is an extraordinary specimen of'——

'It is marvellous,' said Martha. 'What does he think him a specimen of?'

'Well, of integrity and simple-heartedness; and yet he has the vanity of a successful child. He says his is the most simple, child-like nature he has ever come across.'

'I wish I could see him with your father's eyes,' said Martha a little ruefully. 'To me he seems about the vulgarest, most commonplace man I have ever met.'

'Oh, he is unpolished,' said Clarissa; 'but we don't mind that. He is a diamond through and through. Father and I like him greatly.'

'Then, I tell you what it is, Clarissa—you will have to wear your ring to-night.'

'My ring!' said Clarissa, turning pale.

'Yes; it is most extraordinary that you never do wear it. Uncle Tom was talking about it to me only yesterday. He said, "I like that lass, and I did think when I got the ring that she would wear it;" and I replied, "Oh, I suppose she thinks it is too fine for everyday." "Well, at least, she will wear it at my party," he said; and then he nodded and looked quite mysterious. You'll have to put it on to-night.'

Clarissa's heart beat fast. She had never confided to Martha the fact that she had sold the ring. Martha now had ceased to question her with regard to her trouble. On one occasion Clarissa had said briefly, 'I have managed to get out of my scrape,' and Martha had given a sigh of relief, and immediately turned the conversation; she had long ago forgotten

that poor Clarissa needed five and thirty pounds to make her happy. Money was common as water to Martha now, and in consequence she valued it very little.

'Things are most disagreeable,' she said. 'There will be a heap of people here to-night—nice people, the nicest in the town, people like your father for instance, and like my father—and there will be Uncle Tom making himself ridiculous. The kindest in the room will only think of him as a vain child; and what will the unkindest think?'

'Oh, dear me, Martha! You are always looking at the gloomy side. I am sure you have no cause to. You live in this beautiful place'——

'Do you call it beautiful?' said Martha, with a look of disgust; 'flower-beds like these, and the horrible way the house is furnished.'

'Well, I like the house; it is not in modern taste, but I sometimes am rather sick of those dull drabs, grays, and greens.'

'Oh, dear me!' said Martha. 'I sometimes think that you have not good taste yourself, Clare.'

'Never mind,' answered Clarissa. 'I like the house, and I like the grounds, and I like those pretty, gay flower-beds. Why, the colour in this bed beside us is quite lovely.' As Clarissa spoke she approached a bed of brilliant hyacinths of every imaginable shade and colour.

'Those were planted in this morning,' said Martha. 'There is nothing sincere and real about the flower-garden; it is the work of the florist, not of Nature. But, Clarissa, you will promise to wear the ring?'

'I will see about it,' said Clare in a disturbed tone.

'I really wish you would. I know uncle will be terribly disappointed if you don't. But oh, my dear, I have to appear in such a terrible dress.'

'Why, aren't you going to wear your white silk —that soft, pretty Frenchy thing, all frills and lace?'

'I intended to wear it, but Uncle Tom has sent to London for a special dress for me, probably recommended by his dear friend the waiter at the 'George' Hotel. It is too awful, really. Oh! there is the carman at the gate with my box. Let us go and see what torture I am to undergo.'

Martha caught her friend's hand and they both ran into the house. The servant was paying for a wooden box, and Martha desired her to take it up to her bedroom. This was done, the cord was removed, the top of the box lifted up, and then the woman withdrew.

'Now then,' said Martha. 'Oh dear! oh dear!' The tissue-paper which surrounded the lovely dress was removed, and beneath lay a robe which might have been extremely becoming to a woman of five-and-twenty, but was scarcely suitable to a young girl of Martha's years and appearance. It was composed of rose-coloured velvet, much trimmed with real lace. The front was all rich brocade embroidered in silver; there was a long train behind; and a bunch of rose-coloured feathers were arranged to wear in the hair.

'Ludicrous!' said Martha.

'Beautiful!' exclaimed Clarissa.

'Oh dear! I cannot be seen in it,' said Martha.

'But you must. You will be the queen of the occasion. I wish I had the chance of wearing it.'

'Then, I am sure, I wish you had,' replied Martha.

'Do try it on, Patty. I want to see you in it.'

Martha complied. Clarissa helped her into the gorgeous robe. It was the work of one of the most finished dressmakers in Bond Street. It fitted like a glove, and swept away from the slim young figure in ponderous and yet graceful folds. Martha's very pale face looked paler than ever with the reflection of the rose-colour.

'The colour does not suit you,' said Clarissa in a critical way. 'I wish—I do wish—I could wear it. I quite envy you.'

'Can't you wear it?' said Martha suddenly. 'I believe Uncle Tom would be quite delighted. Won't you wear it? Oh, I wish you would. Our figures are almost exactly alike; it would fit you quite as well as it fits me.'

'I wish I could,' said Clarissa. 'It would be a daring thing to do—wouldn't it? Mother and father would be shocked; but I do feel as if I longed for a bit of fun.'

'Then, I tell you what. Uncle Tom is so fond of you that I don't believe he will mind. He is in the garden now; shall I run and ask him?'

'Oh! no, no. I was only joking,' said Clarissa. 'Of course I cannot wear your dress.'

'Just to save me from looking a merry-andrew, a figure of fun. And you will look beautiful in it,' said Martha. 'Here, try it on—do.' She hastily slipped the dress off herself, and Clarissa submitted to be dressed in the rose-coloured velvet.

Clarissa's colour was delicate, her eyebrows dark and finely-marked, her quantities of dark hair were piled up high on her little head. She had a long neck

and a very white throat. The lace ruffles fell away from her rounded arms, the bunch of pink feathers were placed in her dark hair. Her eyes shone; the colour deepened in her cheeks.

'Oh dear!' she said.

'Oh!' exclaimed Martha. 'Why, you are absolutely a beauty—a great beauty—in this dress, and I am a fright in it. Do—do wear it for my sake.'

'But what will your uncle say?'

'Shall I ask him, or will you wear it just to have a bit of fun—just to take some of the crudity off the thing, to excite us all? Oh, won't you—won't you?'

'Very well, if you like,' said Clarissa. 'I declare I'll risk it. I must tell father and mother afterwards that I did it for fun.'

Martha was now in the highest spirits.

'This atones for everything!' she said. 'I can be sweet simplicity, and you can be the charming lady of the olden times. What a train that woman has made, and how well you manage it, Clare. You were born to be a fine lady. You are lovely; I am proud of you.'

'The dress certainly does make me pretty,' said Clarissa. 'I never longed for fine clothes before; this is exciting.'

'Well, take it off now. You must come early and I will help to dress you. I won't say a word to Uncle Tom. When he sees you coming downstairs in the gorgeous dress he'll be so proud and so delighted that he won't have time to be angry with me. When I tell him I did it out of love for you, he'll quite forgive me. By the way, Clare, suppose you hadn't come now and seen me in this dress, and delivered me from

absolute failure this evening, what dress would you yourself have worn?'

'Oh, something very, very simple—a little old muslin which has been washed two or three times, and a blue sash, I think. Mother was saying that my evening dress was shabby; but it did not matter, as I was not "out" yet.'

'Delightful,' said Martha. 'I must let my own mother into the secret; but no one else shall know until you appear on the scene.'

Soon afterwards Clarissa took her leave. The very last thing Martha whispered to her was, 'Be sure you wear the pearl ring; it will be in keeping with the rest of the dress.'

'And that I cannot do,' thought the girl. 'I suppose I am mad to wear Martha's dress; but I really do feel as if I must have a bit of fun just for a change.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LADY OF THE OLDEN TIME.

CLARISSA ran home in excellent spirits. She met Janet in the street just outside the house.

Janet danced up to her sister. 'What is the matter with you, Clare? What are you laughing at? Has anything nice happened?'

'Something so nice,' replied Clarissa, 'so daring, so exciting, that I scarcely know myself. It is spring, Janey; and summer is near, and my heart is singing, and the birds are singing too, and the flowers are coming out, and I am in high spirits; and I am going to do a daring, naughty, naughty thing, Janey—a very naughty thing.'

'I wouldn't know you,' said Janet. 'What is the matter? Are you—have you a headache? Is your head getting queer?'

'You silly little mite! Nothing of the sort, kiddy. I am all right. Come into the house and I'll tell you.'

'Mother was in such a fret about your dress for this evening,' said Janet, as she linked her hand inside her sister's arm; 'do you know, the laundress scorched all the front breadth. Mother says you cannot wear it, and that you must just have a dark

skirt and a white silk blouse. She says, as you are not "out," it will not matter.'

'But I think it matters a great deal,' said Clarissa. 'Now, look here, Janey; you must help me.'

She rushed upstairs with Janet, and they both entered the drawing-room together. There was no one else in the room.

'What is it? What is it?' asked Janet.

'I am going to Jenkins Manor quite early this evening, and I am not going to tell father and mother. I am going to leave you to manage things; you must break the news. You are to say that I am going to dress there, and that it will be all right—quite all right.'

'You are going to dress there? What do you mean?'

'Exactly what I say. Something splendid is going to happen. I will tell you, for I tell you everything. Mr Jenkins—dear, good, rough, comical Mr Jenkins—has sent to town for a dress for Patty; and, lo and behold! while I was there to-day the robe appeared, fit for a princess, Janey, and that silly, stupid Martha did not like it; and I must honestly say it did not suit her.'

'What was it made of?' asked Janet, clasping her sister's hand and looking into her face with round eyes of delight and curiosity.

'What was it *not* made of? Oh! you will never guess; but I shall try to describe it to you. Velvet, soft and rich, colour of the rosiest clouds at sunset; oh! and rose-coloured brocade, and a lot of silver embroidery, and real lace, soft and fine as a cobweb; and rose-coloured feathers for the hair, and little

shoes of rose-coloured satin with great big buckles. And the style! Oh! the style is like a picture-lady. There, Janey!'

'It sounds lovely,' said Janet. 'But you say it does not suit Martha?'

'It makes a fright of Martha; it is not the least bit the kind of dress she ought to have. You know she has no colour. Oh! she is a dear old thing, and has a bonnie face of her own; but she was never meant to be made poetry of; but I was—I was, Janey.'

Here Clarissa poised herself on one graceful toe, and began to pirouette about the room. 'I am to wear the dress! I am to wear the dress!' she cried.

'You? But it was not meant for you.'

'It is meant for Martha; but she and I have arranged it. She will be in the loveliest, softest, white silk. She will look sweet, and I'll be the grand lady of the olden times; but father and mother are not to know. It is to be a surprise, a joke, a great bit of fun; and your part is to tell father and mother that I have gone to Jenkins Manor to dress, and that it is all right. Now, don't keep me. I must run upstairs and do my work. I brought a lot from school; but I shall scarcely be able to do it. All my mind is full of the dress.'

'You are venturesome,' said little Janet. 'I hope you won't get into an awful scrape. Does Mr Jenkins expect you to wear the ring to-night?'

'Oh, Janey! I declare you are quite a little worry. I don't suppose Mr Jenkins will think of the ring. Anyhow, you know, darling, I haven't got it, and you know what I have done with it.'

'I know you are the dearest darling in all the world,' replied little Janet. 'How I do wish I could see you! You will be beautiful! I'll be thinking of you in my dreams.'

In course of time Clarissa hurried away. No one observed her as she left the house. The evenings were long now. She was thankful that she met none of her friends as she hurried back to Jenkins Manor. She found the place in great excitement. Jenkins was here, there, and everywhere. Clarissa, however, managed to keep out of his sight; and presently she found herself safely conveyed to Martha's bedroom.

'Oh, here you are!' said Martha. 'Have you quite made up your mind?'

'Quite,' said Clarissa; 'quite. I told Janet. Janet is astonished. I'll manage Mr Jenkins. He sha'n't be angry with me. Mother must receive it as a joke; father will be all right. Oh, I must have my fun! I feel as if a great longing which I have had all my life were about to be fulfilled, Martha.'

Martha laughed. Her spirits became high too.

'This atones for a great deal,' she said. 'It will make up for the terrible incongruity of the whole evening. The *gaucherie* of Uncle Tom will be smoothed down by you. You must manage him all you can, Clarissa.'

'I'll manage him; he is quite an old dear,' said the girl.

Presently she found herself dressed in the lovely robe; and Martha, in her soft silk, looked nearly as nice, although by no means as striking as her friend.

There came a tap at the door, and Mrs Moore—

who, in the pleasure and excitement of her present mode of life, and the excellent food which she now got, had to a great extent recovered the use of her limbs—stood before them.

Mrs Moore was dressed according to Jenkins's ideas of good taste. She submitted somewhat ruefully to a gorgeous dress of yellow velvet; it had a very long train, but was made fairly suitable by being trimmed with quantities of black Spanish lace. She had real diamond stars in her hair, and a diamond necklace trembled round her somewhat thin throat.

'It is all ridiculous, my dear,' she said. 'Oh, Martha, you look nice, darling; and—why, Clarissa'——

Clarissa danced up to Mrs Moore. 'How do I look?' she said.

'Sweet! beautiful! Like a story.'

'That's what I feel. It's lovely to look like a story,' said Clarissa. 'Shall we go downstairs now? I want Mr Jenkins to get over his surprise before father and mother come.'

'I tell you what it is,' said Martha. 'You run down first, Clare. Have it out with him before I come. If he sees me looking, as he says, pinched and white, and with no colour anywhere, he'll be very cross, and he won't forgive me; and then he'll be terrible all the evening.'

'Oh, Clarissa! you know what a kind heart he has,' said Mrs Moore.

'Well, mother,' exclaimed Martha, 'I don't admire your dress; but I suppose you will have to wear it.'

'I think you look very nice indeed, Mrs Moore,' said Clarissa. 'Good-bye, Martha. If you think I am afraid of your Uncle Tom you are vastly mistaken.'

As she spoke, she flitted past the two and tripped downstairs.

Clarissa was naturally graceful, and the velvet dress, beautifully and perfectly made, was not in the least cumbersome. Nay, it seemed to gather lightness round her young frame, to soften and accentuate every charm of her graceful figure and piquante face.

Jenkins was standing in the hall. The hall of Jenkins Manor was really a very noble apartment, being practically a huge square room open to the roof; and now, adorned as it was with innumerable flowering plants, and rendered soft by electric lights covered with rose-coloured shades, it was sufficiently imposing to strike pride to the heart of any owner.

Jenkins, in an immaculate evening suit straight from the smartest tailors in London, was almost beside himself with good-humour as he paced up and down waiting for his guests. The refreshments had been ordered straight from London, and several waiters also from the Metropolis had arrived. Everything was taken out of Jenkins's hands and placed in the hands of those who knew how to act, and to act well and with precision. He felt comparatively easy in his mind.

'Rodney shall see that I know a thing or two,' he said to himself. 'Arbuthnot shall see'—here he quoted a well-known magistrate of the neighbourhood; 'Carlton shall see'—Carlton happened to be the member of parliament of the district, and a baronet to boot. They were all coming, these three, with their wives and daughters; and Jenkins felt how delightful would that moment be when he could lay

his hand on Rodney's arm, call him 'My dear fellow,' and enter the smoking-room with Carlton at his other side.

Yes, and that pretty little girl—the girl who had been good to him when he was rough and uncouth, who had seen his good qualities then; he wondered what she would think of it all.

Jenkins wore diamond studs in his shirt-front and diamond links in his cuffs; and now he turned his red, smiling, good-humoured face towards the staircase, for a figure was coming softly down, a figure which paused now and then and glanced shyly towards him, and then came on a step or two.

'Martha!' he said under his breath. 'Why, she looks quite a nice little thing — quite presentable. Eh! what would my mother say if she were here to see us all to-night? She would say, "Tom, my boy, you are extravagant. You are not doing just the right thing; but, once in a way, Tom, have your fling, and may your mother's blessing go with it."'

As these last thoughts came to him he stepped a little nearer towards the staircase, and the next instant Clarissa, with a little run and a courtesy, stood before him.

'What do you think of me?' she said breathlessly.

'Eh!' he said. 'Eh! You're Martha?'

'No; I'm Clarissa Rodney. You know you and I have always been excellent friends; and forgive me —I did such a naughty thing.'

'I don't think you could, Miss Clarissa,' said the man.

'But I did; and I must tell you in such a hurry. You know you sent to town for a dress for Patty?'

The next instant Clarissa, with a little run and a courtesy, stood before him.

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'So I did. No one can say that I spare money on the lass. I do everything that uncle can for her.'

'Indeed—indeed you do. But you have been so good to me, and you have spoiled me; and I hadn't a pretty frock to wear at your grand, lovely party, and this dress didn't suit Patty, and here it is on me. Oh, please don't scold me!'

Jenkins stared. Then his face grew very red, and his lips divided and showed his strong white teeth; then he burst into a great, loud laugh.

''Pon my word!' he said. ''Pon my word!'

'Oh, you are not angry?' said Clarissa in some alarm. 'Is it a very, very dreadful thing of me to do? It was just a joke, and because I wanted to look pretty just for one night.'

'You are charming, Miss Clarissa, and I am delighted. So Martha wouldn't wear the grand dress? But you're not too proud.'

'Martha isn't a bit too proud—not a bit; but really it didn't suit her. I must tell you the sort of dress to get for her some day—something "Quakery" and soft, and just as expensive; but not this sort. But Martha shall have this back; it is only just for to-night. And you won't be angry? I'll tell every one, if you like, that it is Martha's dress, and that I have worn it for the fun of the thing.'

'If you wear the dress,' said Jenkins suddenly, 'you must wear the rest of the things. Come this way.'

Before she knew what he was doing he took her hand, dragged her down a corridor, and, opening the door of his own private study, went in, pushing the girl before him.

'There,' he said, pressing a morocco-case into her

hand; 'it will suit the ring. Pop it on—pop it on quickly.'

She opened the case; some of the joy went out of her glowing face. Inside was a single row of pearls, with a small diamond clasp.

'This was for Patty,' he said; 'it cost a big lot. They are all beauties, every single one of them. I won't tell you what they cost. You take them with the dress; take them and keep them. I like you, Miss Clarissa; you have always been good to me; you have always soothed me—not rubbed me the wrong way. I'd do a great deal for a lass like you. I wish you were my niece.'

'But I cannot take them,' she said.

'But why not? They'll fit the ring.—By the way, where is the ring?'

He suddenly seized her hand, raised it, looked at it, and a frown came on his face.

'Not fine enough—eh?' he said. 'It is all sweetness to my face and t'other way behind my back? Speak out, young lady—is it or is it not?'

'It is *not*,' said Clarissa. 'I am true; oh, I am true! And I am so grateful to you, and I will wear the dress and the pearls to-night.'

'And you forgot the ring? I thought of you a good bit when I bought it; so you have forgotten it?'

'Not—not exactly,' said poor Clarissa.

Just at that moment Mrs Moore was heard calling her brother. Visitors were evidently arriving.

'Bless me!' said Jenkins; 'I forgot. Well, be quick; pop on the necklace now. I am proud of you. The dress suits you, and you suit the dress.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSEQUENCES.

NOTHING could exceed the astonishment of Mrs Rodney when, a few moments later, she came face to face with her radiant young daughter. The Professor, who accompanied his wife, looking very erect and very noble, and very, very intellectual, only saw that a sweet, pretty girl in rose-colour, looking like a rose of summer, approached him. He took in no details; the face was the face of the girl he loved, the eyes were Clarissa's eyes, those smiling lips showing the pearly teeth within belonged to his girl—the one perhaps in the whole world whom he loved best. But Mrs Rodney saw things from a very different point of view; she turned pale and clutched Clarissa's arm.

'What is the meaning of this?' she said. 'Are you mad? Why have you decked yourself out in that merry-andrew fashion? And the things are not your own. What is the meaning of this?'

'I will tell you another time, mother. It is nothing wrong; it is just a bit of fun, something planned by Martha and me. Don't take any notice, please.'

Just then more visitors arrived, and Professor and

Mrs Rodney were pushed aside; and Clarissa, only too glad to get away from her mother's reproving and indignant eyes, found herself talking to several young friends in one of the long corridors.

The rest of the evening passed something like a dream. Clarissa was quite under the impression that she enjoyed herself. It is certain that a great many people looked at her; in fact, she was far and away the most distinguished figure in the room. Her colour glowed brighter in her cheeks—that colour was always delicate and soft as the summer rose; it became very nearly damask to-night, but not quite. Her eyes were brighter than ever. People said they would not know Clarissa Rodney. One whispered to the other:

'What a beauty the girl has grown! How lovely she will be in a year or two! But what great extravagance to put her into that dress! And those pearls too—they must have belonged to the mother, of course; but the whole get-up is unsuitable.'

'Sweetly becoming,' said the neighbour addressed. 'Unsuitable or not, nothing could make the young girl more charming.'

And then Clarissa herself came up, and an old lady, one of the county folk, took her hand and drew her aside, and said:

'My dear, let me congratulate you. You might be "Lady Teazle," or your namesake "Clarissa Harlowe," or any of the other beauties of the olden times. What exquisite taste, my dear; and how the dress suits you. You must let me know your mother's dressmaker.'

'I will have to tell you the truth, Lady Winsley,' was Clarissa's reply. 'The dress is not mine at all;

it belongs to Martha Moore. Her uncle—dear, kind Mr Jenkins, our host—bought it for her; but it didn't suit her, and I am wearing it for fun.'

Lady Winsley's face looked grave and surprised; she did not smile or treat it as a joke, as Clarissa thought she would. The girl herself darted away, and Lady Winsley turned to her companion. 'What sort of woman can Mrs Rodney be, to permit such a thing?' she said. 'Not her own dress at all; bought by that vulgar man, Mr Jenkins!'

But just then the vulgar man himself hove in sight, and seeing Clarissa standing a little disconcerted, he came up to her and made a suggestion.

'You are the queen of the occasion,' he said. 'Martha should have taken the lead, but she has put herself out of court. You are the queen, and what you decide shall take place. What do you say to a little dance—an impromptu of course? The band shall play dance-music; and may I lead you out? Will you lead with me? Come—is it to be?'

Clarissa was so excited that she could refuse nothing. A few moments later she was dancing. Now, Tom Jenkins, although as rough as a bear and nearly as clumsy as one, was a beautiful dancer; he had learned that accomplishment as a boy. He had learned it, almost as soon as he could walk, from his own mother; and in his wild bush-life he had often amused himself with the pastime. Clarissa found herself borne along lightly, her feet scarcely touching the ground. She caught her mother's face, pale with indignation—her mother's eyes, dark with anger.

'It will be the deluge when all is over,' thought the poor girl; 'but I will have my fun while I can.'

Soon several couples were on the floor. The band struck up more and more cheery airs; the room resounded with mirth. Several young men asked Clarissa for the privilege of dancing with her; and more and more people looked at the lovely girl, who might have stepped down, as they expressed it, from a picture by Romney.

But the gayest times come to an end. By-and-by the guests departed. Mrs Rodney came and touched her daughter. 'Go upstairs and take that thing off. Come down in your ordinary dress, and come home with your father and me,' she said.

'Yes, mother,' answered Clarissa in a submissive tone. She went up to Martha. 'Martha,' she said, 'may I go to your room? I want to change my dress.'

'Eh—what?' said Thomas Jenkins, who was standing near; 'change your dress? But you'll do nothing of the kind. You don't suppose Martha is going to have it after you have worn it? It is yours—given to you by me. Proud and delighted to do it, I'm sure; and you shall keep the necklace too; and what is more, you shall wear the dress again—you shall come here and wear it. I like you in it.—Martha, you must see plenty of your young friend; perhaps she will give me a hint as to the sort of dress which does please your fine young-ladyship. Miss Clarissa likes *my* taste.—Be sure you go home in the dress, miss—that is all I have got to say.'

But Clarissa did not dare to. She ran upstairs, slipped off the rose-coloured bewitching robe, put on

her own, and scribbled a little note to Martha: 'Please keep the dress, and soothe Mr Jenkins as best you can. I am afraid I have done wrong to wear it;' and ran downstairs.

Mr and Mrs Rodney were waiting for her. The three went back in silence. As soon as they reached the house Mrs Rodney laid her hand on Clarissa's arm. 'I shall come upstairs to speak to you presently,' she said. 'Go now at once to your room. I am displeased with you. I am very much displeased and astonished.'

'Oh, come, come!' said the Professor, 'what has Clare done?—I am sure, my dear Clarissa, I never saw you look more charming. Where did you get the idea for your dress?'

'Where did Clarissa get the idea for her dress?' cried Mrs Rodney. 'If you knew, I wonder what you would say.'

'If I knew! But what is it, Miriam? What is the matter?'

'This is the matter,' replied Mrs Rodney; 'and the sooner that misguided, silly, obstinate girl is put under proper control the better. She absolutely dared, in the house of that vulgar man, to wear a dress of his buying, of his choosing—a dress which he meant for his own niece.'

'No. Impossible!' said Mr Rodney. He did turn a little pale, and he certainly looked shocked.

'Oh, don't! don't!' cried Clarissa, who was almost in tears at this moment. 'Don't look at me like that. I cannot stand it.' She pushed past both parents and ran to her own room.

Janet was sound asleep. Clarissa went and stood

by the bed, and looked down at the charming little face with a smile of unconsciousness on it. Presently Janet opened her eyes.

'You have come back,' she said. 'How did you look? Did you look quite like a fairy princess? I have been dreaming about you.'

'I did it,' said Clarissa; 'and I, strange as it may seem, enjoyed it. But oh, Janey! mother is wild. I don't mind that so much; but father, he had a look on his face as if I had disgraced him. Oh, Janey darling! things seem to be getting worse and worse.'

Just then a step on the stairs caused both girls to turn their heads, and the next moment Mrs Rodney came into the room.

'So you are awake, Janet,' she said. 'And perhaps Clarissa has been telling you of what happened?—Now, my dear Clarissa, turn round and look at me.'

Clarissa did so.

Mrs Rodney seated herself, placed her candle on the chest of drawers, and looked full at the excited, agitated girl.

'I want to know the meaning of this,' said Mrs Rodney.

'Of what, mother?'

'You know. Don't prevaricate. You know what I mean. Why did you wear a dress which did not belong to you?'

'Mother, you don't understand,' began Clarissa; 'it was just a bit of fun. It all came about in the most natural, unexpected way. I went to see Patty this morning, and she showed me the rose-coloured velvet dress, and said how she hated it, how she detested

wearing it; and then she made me try it on. And it really did make a fright of her, and it made me—well'—— Clarissa paused.

'I am not going to encourage your vanity,' replied Mrs Rodney. 'You had quite enough congratulations to-night to turn any head. I should be ashamed of appearing in borrowed plumes, if I were you. Well, go on.'

'I was tempted, mother. I did think I looked nice, and I wanted to be well dressed just for once.'

'Well dressed by somebody else!' said Mrs Rodney in a tone of the utmost scorn.

'I didn't think of all those things, mother; it was just the temptation. When you are young, you know, and—oh! mother, can't you understand—have you no sympathy? Did you never, never, never want to look as nice as you possibly could?'

'I am thankful to say,' replied Mrs Rodney in a tone of fervour, 'that I never yet publicly disgraced myself for the sake of my appearance.'

'Then you don't understand,' said Clarissa, and there was a ring of despair in her voice.

'I certainly do not understand you; but you need not go on with your explanation. Your vanity carried the day, and you did something which neither your father nor I can ever forgive.'

'Oh, mother! Forgive! What do you mean?'

'What I say. Your father is even more hurt than I am. We are both shocked with you. It seems to me that we cannot keep you in this place. Of course you must stay till the end of the term; but afterwards'——

'But the scholarship, mother?' here interrupted

little Janet. 'Clare will lose the scholarship if she goes.'

'I forgot that,' said Mrs Rodney. 'It really is too annoying. I wish those Moores and that objectionable Mr Jenkins would leave the town. Well, Clarissa, you are too old to be whipped, which is what you deserve; but do not expect any indulgence from me. I am extremely angry with you.'

With these words Mrs Rodney left the room; and poor Clarissa, notwithstanding her joyful, exciting, triumphant evening, cried herself to sleep.

Things were no better the next morning. She went down to breakfast feeling all the revulsion of her last evening's high spirits; her head ached, and she could scarcely touch the plain food which Mrs Rodney thought it her duty to provide for her. The Professor was there too; and although he looked up at Clarissa with his usual affectionate smile, the next moment he seemed to remember something, for his brows met in a frown, the words he was about to speak were arrested on his lips, and he opened the newspaper which lay before him and soon buried himself in its contents.

Poor Clarissa's happiness was not added to when just at that moment the servant entered the room bearing a box. The box was long, the sort which dresses are put into; it was corded, and addressed in a large handwriting to Miss Clarissa Rodney. Accompanying the box was a little case wrapped up in brown paper, and also a letter.

'What can it be?' said little Janet.

Mrs Rodney desired the servant to withdraw.

'Open your letter at once,' she said. 'This requires stringent measures.'

Clarissa did open the letter, guessing well what it contained. It ran as follows:

My Dear Miss Clarissa,—Martha has told me that you went away in your little old dress last night, and left the pretty rose-coloured dress and the pearls behind you. My dear Miss Clarissa, you looked charming in the dress, and even more charming with the pearls. Perhaps you were not aware that I had made you a present of the dress and also of the necklace. It is a great pleasure to me to give you these things. You have always been kind to me, and I think you have liked me a little bit for myself. I hope, as you were not too proud to wear the dress last night, you won't be too proud to keep it for future occasions. I shall always welcome you here in the rose-coloured velvet; and perhaps your lady-mother may feel that, under the circumstances, you may as well have the dress altogether for your own. It was very plucky of you, my lass, to wear it last night, and I respect you for honouring the taste of Thomas Jenkins. When we meet next you can thank me—that is, if you care to. Meanwhile I remain, yours with great sincerity, Thomas Jenkins.

Jenkins had secured for himself a crest from the Herald Office, which was emblazoned now on his note-paper; and there was also in bright crimson characters the words 'Jenkins Manor.'

Mrs Rodney stood close to Clarissa while she read. She had scarcely come to the end of Jenkins's letter before her mother seized it, read it too, and handed it to the Professor.

'Well,' she said, 'I am sorry to disturb you, my

dear; but before you go to attend to your lectures I must ask you to run your eye over this.'

The Professor did run his eye over it.

'I don't quite understand,' he said. 'Clare seems to have made a mess of it all round last night; but I think Jenkins is generous. He naturally would not want his own niece to wear a dress which does not suit her, and which does suit Clare. I am sure Clare looked extremely charming in the dress; and he has given it to the child. I don't see anything for it, my dear Miriam, but to'——

'To disgrace ourselves?' said Mrs Rodney. 'James, you must be mad. What are you talking about? Allow our child to wear clothes given to her by that Mr Jenkins—that rough, boorish person whose acquaintance we ought not to make, in whose house we ought not to be seen.—Clarissa, I must take steps, and immediate steps. Sit down and write what I dictate.'

'But, mother, please,' said Clarissa, turning rosy red and then very pale.

'Well, I'm off,' said the Professor, rising. 'Do what you think right, Miriam; only understand that, when all is said and done, the man is honest and good at bottom—a better gentleman at bottom than half the fine, polished men I know.'

Mrs Rodney pretended not to hear these words.

'Janet, what are you lingering for?' she said. 'Go to school.—Now, Clare, sit down.'

'But, mother, please'——

'Sit down.'

'But, mother'——

'Will you, or will you not, do what I bid you?'

'Indeed, mother, if I must return the dress, may I not go and see him, and try and explain?'

'If you don't do immediately what I tell you I forbid you ever to enter that house again.'

Clarissa sighed, felt her own will bend to the stronger will of her mother, and sat down.

'I don't know what is the matter with the world,' said Mrs Rodney; 'everything seems turning topsy-turvy. I have had no peace nor ease nor comfort in the house since the mysterious disappearance of that sovereign. Some one stole the sovereign, and in order to secure him or herself from being discovered stole my note-book also. It is most mysterious. I am thoroughly unhappy, thoroughly dissatisfied. I have the very strangest suspicions. There are moments, Clare, when I even suspect you.'

'Oh, mother!'

'You may well be shocked; of course I am not serious. If I thought, even for a moment, that you would do anything of that sort, I would almost disown you; but, of course, my dear child, we will discover the thief yet. Now, however, to other business. I almost, Clarissa, last night, ceased to consider you a lady, your conduct was so reprehensible.'

'I shall be late for school, mother. Can I not wait until I come back to write this?'

'You must bear the forfeit which will be yours for being late for school. You shall not stir a step until Mr Jenkins is written to. Here is a sheet of paper; begin.'

Mrs Rodney herself dipped her daughter's pen in ink and put it into her hand.

'Write "Sir."'

'But, mother'——

'Put "Sir" on your paper immediately.'

Clarissa did so.

'"You have made a mistake."'

Clarissa wrote, 'You have made a mistake. I acknowledge that I wore the dress last night in a fit of unpardonable giddiness and frivolity.'

'Have you put that, Clarissa: "Unpardonable giddiness and frivolity?"'

'Yes, mother; but he won't understand. He was on the whole pleased. He has a very tender heart—he has really, mother.'

'If you talk to me any more about the virtues of that man I shall shake you. Go on. "Mother and father were extremely displeased with me for what they considered a most vulgar action on my part. They cannot for a single moment permit me to accept the dress nor the pearl necklace. I now return both to you; and remain, yours sincerely,

CLARISSA RODNEY."

'Mother, such a letter as that will half break his heart.'

'If it has the effect of getting him to move from the place it will be a very good thing indeed,' said Mrs Rodney. 'Now, fasten it up. Give it to me. You can go to school. I am glad that I have put a stop to any more familiarity on the part of that objectionable person.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISILLUSIONMENT.

ON the night before, when the party was over and the last guest had said good-bye, Jenkins was in such an excellent humour that he would not permit either his niece Martha or his sister to retire to bed. Mrs Moore was quite anxious to get away to her own room, for she was not accustomed to late hours nor festive scenes, and her head ached; and she would have liked to feel herself well out of her yellow velvet and black lace, but this was by no means Jenkins's will.

'Let's sit down and talk things over,' he said. 'It was very agreeable, very agreeable.—Eh, Patty?' he said; 'and what did you think of it?'

'It was very nice, Uncle Tom. I enjoyed myself.'

'Ah! you enjoyed yourself—did you?' he said. He had flung himself back into a very deep chair; his legs were stretched out in front of him; he thrust his hands into his pockets. His face was red, and his red hair stood up wildly all over his head. His blue eyes were very bright, however; and, as he fixed them now on Martha, he broke forth into a good-natured laugh.

'I ought to be wild with you,' he said. 'You played

a nasty joke on your old uncle. Here was I thinking of you, planning for you, doing everything I could to make you happy. Here was I going off alone to London, and going to the very best dressmakers and consulting with them; finding myself in a dressmaker's room, talking to her and giving her the measurement of your waist, and the length of your skirt, and the colour—no, I didn't do that. I asked her what a young girl would look pretty in and striking in, and out of the common in; and she said, "Do you want her to look like a picture?" And I clapped my hands and I said, "That's it; that's it exactly. You've hit it, madam," I said. And she said, "Leave it to me;" and I left it to her, with *carte-blanche* as to expense. And the dress came, and, lo and behold! it was not good enough for you.'

'Oh, uncle, you make a mistake!' said Martha. 'Why will you insist on misunderstanding me? It was more than good enough—it was a great deal too good; but it wasn't the colour that suits me. If you saw me dressed in it now you wouldn't like me in it. I know you wouldn't. Shall I go up and put it on? Will you judge for yourself?'

Jenkins laughed.

'Shall I judge for myself? No, thank you. A lass whom it did suit wore it—a bonnie, pretty, unaffected lass, a girl after my own heart, a girl my mother would have liked. Talk of prettiness; did you ever see a prettier or bonnier face? And the dress suited her, and she has taken it, and a right she has to it. You have lost it, Martha; and you have lost the pearl necklace. And that necklace is worth money, let me

tell you—worth money; it has taken a slice off my pile—that it has.'

'But I know for a fact that Clarissa has not taken the dress,' said Martha. 'I was up in my room just now, and I saw it there, and also the pearl necklace. Of course, she did not think for a moment that you meant her to have it.'

'Oh, that's it—is it? Then off it shall go in the morning as early as possible. Dear, nice, good little girl! She shall have it. I like a girl who sees the best in a fellow, and is not always making up her mind to rub him the wrong way. There, Martha, you can go to bed. Put the dress into the box, and put the pearls back into their case, and leave them outside your door. I'll write a letter to the lass. Now, off to bed you go.'

Martha, only too thankful, obeyed.

Jenkins turned to his sister. 'What's the matter with that girl of yours, Polly?' he said. 'Why don't she take after you, or after my poor mother, or after any one on earth except her own pattern?'

'Nothing ails her,' said Mrs Moore. 'She can't help the way she is made. I wish you would not always run her down, Tom.'

'Oh! that's it—is it?' said Tom. 'It vexes you—does it, Polly? Well, I don't want to vex you, dear.' He got up, took his sister's hand and stroked it.

'You looked very nice to-night, Polly, and I was proud of you. Perhaps you had better go to bed too, and I'll say no more to you about Martha. She shall have a dress to suit her; that she shall. I'll consult the little witch about it.'

'Who do you call the little witch?'

'Miss Rodney, little Miss Clarissa.'

'She is not little, Tom; she is a great tall girl.'

'She has nice ways, all the same,' said Thomas Jenkins; 'and I'll call her little if it takes my fancy.' He went out of the room, and Mrs Moore left it also.

Early the following morning Thomas Jenkins awoke, and the first person he thought of was Clarissa. He was highly pleased with her for wearing the dress. At first he had been just a tiny bit surprised, and a tiny bit annoyed too; but now he had brought himself to consider that it was quite a noble action on her part, a sort of public allegiance to him. 'I wish I could adopt her,' he said. 'I'd like well to feel that the little girl belonged to me, that I could be a sort of father to her. I wish I could change her and Patty; but, there, of course that can't be done. But why shouldn't I adopt her all the same? She might live with her father and yet be my sort of adopted daughter. She wants pretty dresses, poor dear; and small wonder. I can give them to her; and I would arrange with the Professor to leave her a good piece out of my pile. And she could often come and stay with Patty; and every one should know that the girl who was kind to Thomas Jenkins when he was nothing but a rough fellow, cooking eggs over the fire, and with his rough colonial clothes, was going to be a sort of heiress of his by-and-by. Why shouldn't Clarissa and Patty be co-heiresses, and why shouldn't they both come out together in London? It's a grand idea. I have a great mind to propose it to the Professor. Rodney is a good fellow, a very good fellow; and if it were not for that fine lady-mother I would soon have it my own way.'

Highly delighted—indeed charmed—with his new idea, which was to turn poor, simple Clarissa into a grand young lady, Jenkins got up, wrote his note, and as soon as possible sent off the box containing the dress and the pearls to Clarissa. He saw the messenger out of the gate, and then turned back in huge good-humour to his breakfast.

'She will be pleased,' he said to himself as he took the cover off the rashers and eggs and helped his sister and Martha.—'Martha,' he said, looking full at that young lady, 'I am going to take you up to town for a fortnight, and I am going to take you too, Polly; and I was thinking that maybe little Miss Clarissa would like to come. We might give her a fine time, and buy her as many clothes as she likes. How old is the little girl, Martha?'

'About my age,' said Martha; 'sixteen.'

'A very pretty age indeed, a young girl just blooming into womanhood; charming. I'd like to do all I can for her. She has shown me kindness which touches me to the heart—yes, that it does.'

Jenkins, having finished his meal, went out into the grounds. He paced up and down, and made plans for his London campaign, as he called it.

'I'll go and see Rodney to-day,' said Jenkins; 'there's nothing like striking while the iron is hot. I'll put it frankly to Rodney. I'll say, "All the world knows that although you are monstrously clever you have scarcely a penny to bless yourself with. And there's that girl of yours, nice and pretty and clever—I'll do for her; I'll help her through the world, I'll give her a good substantial provision. I'll make a will, and show you what I mean, so that everything

shall be safe and certain; and I'll settle something a year on her, and she shall want for nothing. The only thing I ask in return is that she shall sometimes come to stay at Jenkins Manor, and shall call me Uncle Tom." Now, that's simple enough. I'll have two nieces. I declare I'm as happy as I can be. I could dispense with Martha; but I can't dispense with my niece Clarissa.—Hullo! What's that?'

Jenkins's meditations and his happy thoughts were interrupted by seeing a messenger coming down the avenue holding a box in his hand. The messenger was greeted by one of the dogs, which barked vociferously. Jenkins rushed to the rescue, and the boy turned and said, in a frightened voice, 'I think this is for you, sir.'

'For me — eh?' exclaimed Jenkins. 'For me? What on earth can it be?' Then it seemed to him that he recognised the box as the one he had corded with his own hands early that morning.

'Here's a note for you, sir,' said the lad, and he pulled poor Clarissa's letter out of his pocket.

'Take the box to the house,' said Jenkins, 'and go off by the back avenue. You have no right to come to the front door. There, off you go; give me the note.'

Jenkins did not know why he talked in such a cross way; but suddenly a pain seemed to seize him about the region of his heart, and he had an intuition that something unpleasant lay before him.

'This looks uncommonly like Miss Clarissa's writing,' he said to himself. 'But why has the box come back? Perhaps she has sent it back empty. Good gracious! what a fright I got. Upon my word, I wouldn't like little miss to deal me a blow. I have been much

comforted by the attitude of little miss ever since I came here; but doubtless it is all right.'

He took the note, opened it, and glanced over its contents. At first it seemed to him that he did not quite take it in. 'Sir'—— He wore glasses, for he was short-sighted; he took them off, produced a large red bandana handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his glasses, and put them on again. '"Sir!" he repeated. 'Good gracious, this is very strange.' He read on. The letter was signed at the end in a neat, precise, and yet somewhat straggling hand, 'Clarissa Rodney.'

He read the whole contents not once, but twice and even three times; then he squeezed up the unoffending sheet of paper in his huge hands, and then tore it into small fragments and let the wind carry the bits over the neatly-kept garden.

Mrs Moore, looking out from her bedroom window, saw the action, and guessed that for some reason Thomas was angry.

Thomas certainly was angry. He was so angry that he scarcely knew himself for a moment. 'So that's her sort,' he said to himself; 'so that's her sort. But no, it cannot be—it cannot be.'

He went stumblingly into the house as though he were half-blind. Mrs Moore came downstairs.

'Why, Thomas,' she said, 'Tom, what's the matter?'

'I have got a nasty blow, that's what's the matter,' said Tom. 'Sit down by me, Polly. Polly, it seems to me that I never did any good when I got that pile together. It don't suit Martha, and it don't suit little Miss Clarissa.'

'Well, it seems to me it suits Clarissa very well,' said Mrs Moore. 'But what is the matter?'

'You may well ask what's the matter. She has not taken the dress. She was not too proud to wear it last night; but she was far too proud to keep it. She sent it back, the dress and the pearls, and as cutting a bit of a note with it as the pen of woman could write. A cruel note I call it—cruel, unpardonable—a horrid note. I thought well of her; she was glad enough to wear my fine feathers in the midst of her fine friends; but accept what I gave her afterwards—no, no.'

'Tell me about it,' said Mrs Moore; 'I don't understand. Was that the note I saw you tearing up in the garden and fluttering the little bits of paper amongst the flower-beds?'

'It was,' said Jenkins, reddening. 'I wish you wouldn't pry. My mother would never do that sort of thing. I tore up the note because I was angry, and I am angry still—very angry. No, I am not going out driving with you. I am very, very, very angry.'

Jenkins strode out of the hall; he paced up and down the gravel walk. All the delightful castle in the air which he had been building during the morning—of turning Clarissa into a niece or as good as a niece to him, of settling some of his wealth on her—was shattered to the dust. He would not even give himself the consolation of thinking that the note had been dictated by that fine madam, as he called Mrs Rodney.

'No,' he said to himself; 'when she pretended to be nice and sympathetic and kind she was laughing at me all the time. Well, let her laugh; let her keep her poverty. I wash my hands of her.'

Presently, Jenkins put on his hat and went out. He felt that he must walk off his indignation. He was glad to remember that Clarissa and Martha were both safe at school; he should not meet either of them.

'If Madam Rodney should be abroad,' he said to himself, 'I'll cut her—yes, I will. She need not suppose that she can come it over me. I have got the pile, and the pile gives power. I have got the great big pile, and she has not got a penny to bless herself with.' He walked down the High Street, looking rough, uncouth, disagreeable. The letter Clarissa had written had effected cruel havoc in his heart and also in his character.

He turned in the direction of South Street, one of the most fashionable streets of the prosperous little town of Upton. In this street were the best shops, some of them very good shops indeed—here were the drapers, here were the milliners, here were the tailors. Jenkins despised these shops. He got his things from London. He would not deal with country shops; 'but they are quite good enough for the folks here,' he said to himself, 'quite good enough.'

Then he wondered if he could let Jenkins Manor, and go abroad, taking his sister with him.

'I could put Martha in a boarding-school. Martha never suited me, and never will,' he said to himself; 'and Polly and I might go about and enjoy ourselves to our hearts' content. Upon my word, that's the best thing to do. It's no good a rough old fellow like me thinking I'll please the pretty little school-girls. I can't do it, and that's flat.—Hullo! what have we here?'

This last ejaculation, which was very loud, came

from Jenkins's lips just as he was passing Richardson the jeweller's. Jenkins, up to the present, had scarcely known that there was a jeweller at Upton; but Richardson, who did a very large trade in keeping all the watches and clocks of the place in order, had a very nice little business in the jewellery line also. Just as Jenkins was passing the window he saw Richardson himself step inside his wire screen and place in the most prominent position a large tray full of rings. Amongst the rings was one of delicate workmanship which contained two pearls. There was something about the pearls which attracted Jenkins's attention; his heart seemed to stand still, then it went on faster than ever. He did not mind what anybody else thought of him; he was the most prosperous man in the town, but that mattered nothing at all at this moment. He pressed his face eagerly up against the glass of the shop window, and stared at that innocent-looking little pearl ring as if he would eat it. 'Two pearls,' he said to himself, 'pearls with that delicate rosy sort of glow in them, and that special shape. And she never wore the ring last night, and she looked confused when I asked her; and she has never worn it since I gave it to her, as far as I can tell. I must look into this. If I find—if I find'——

The next instant he had burst open the swing doors of the shop and stood in front of the counter before the astonished Mr Richardson.

'I have come to look at some of your jewellery,' said Jenkins. 'Anything suitable for a young lady—eh? I have a notion that I'd like to give a present to a young lady. I don't mind whether it's second-hand or not.'

'I have several things—brooches, earrings, bracelets —quite suitable for young ladies,' said Richardson.

'Well, show them, man—show them,' said Jenkins.

Mr Richardson, a very refined-looking man beside Thomas Jenkins, immediately did produce from his window trays of bracelets and other trinkets.

'No, no,' said Jenkins. 'No; I want rings.'

Richardson opened a drawer and took out some new rings of different qualities and different orders of merit.

'Anything in the second-hand line—eh?' said Jenkins, giving him a piercing glance.

'Oh yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I have some very pretty rings, some quite valuable—a pearl ring, for instance; quite the thing for a young lady. Is it for your daughter, sir?'

'I'm not married,' roared Jenkins. 'I want to see all the second-hand rings you have got.'

The tray containing poor Clarissa's ring was now produced. Jenkins immediately took it up.

'How much do you want for this?' he said.

Richardson, who had before now regretted that he had given Clarissa forty pounds for the ring, immediately asked sixty for it; and in five minutes' time Jenkins had left the shop with the little pearl ring in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXIX.

'PAST BEARING.'

JENKINS went straight home. Once or twice, as he walked rapidly down the street, and in the direction of Jenkins Manor, he put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket and felt the little pearl ring. It seemed to burn him when he touched it. His face was red; the day was warm for the time of year, and he mopped his hot forehead time and again. At last he reached the avenue, swung open the heavy iron gates, and walked in the direction of the house.

Time had been when he was proud of Jenkins Manor, when he was proud of the grounds, proud of the greenhouses, proud of the vineries, proud of the flower-beds. Time had been also when he had felt a great deal of honest pride in the house and furniture. 'It would have pleased my mother,' he used to say under his breath; and whenever he thought of his mother or spoke of her his heart used to glow. But there was no glow in his heart now, nor did he take any pride in the place or its surroundings. He went into the house; there was no one in sight. Martha was away at school; Mrs Moore was not in her room. The servants had not yet come upstairs to lay the

cloth for lunch. The clock in the hall ticked slowly and ponderously, the minute-hand pointing to a quarter-past twelve.

'Good,' said Jenkins to himself, 'the day is still young. I have got something to do.'

He took the ring out of his pocket and looked at it. He turned it round and round; he slipped it on his little finger. It was a small ring, meant for a small, slender finger; it would not go over the second joint of his little finger.

'A pretty little ring,' he said to himself, 'bought with all the good intentions in the world—bought for a girl to wear whom I thought was true and had no silly pride in her, a girl who might receive a present from an old fellow like me and not be silly about it.'

He slipped it back into his pocket. After a moment's thought he ran upstairs, and rudely burst open the door of Martha's room.

Martha's room was in the west wing of the house. It was a very pretty chamber; it had been furnished, just as her sitting-room had been, by her own desire and in her own taste. Truth to tell, Jenkins had never entered this room from the time he had first bought the house. Martha had chosen it because it had two windows, one facing due south and one east. She was fond of sunshine, particularly morning sunshine. Trees grew close to the windows, and in the summer would temper the heat. The blinds were half-way down now, the French casements were open, a soft breeze came in and swayed the pretty curtains backwards and forwards. The curtains were of soft Liberty silk of a delicate green colour; the carpet was felt, also

of green; the furniture was walnut with heavy brass mountings; the little bed in the distant alcove had a pale-green bed-spread over it.

The room was exquisitely neat; for Martha, in her new surroundings, had become the soul of order.

Jenkins now entered, something like an angry bull in the proverbial china-shop, and looked around him. The furniture of the room was ordinary enough; but what gave it its special charm were the knick-knacks on the mantelpiece, the pretty things on the dressing-table, the pictures on the walls.

There was a bookcase with choice books hanging up against one of the walls; this faced the light, and Jenkins saw the bindings of many of Ruskin's works and a complete set of Browning in calf with gold lettering. He looked around him. On ordinary occasions he would have noticed nothing. He noticed everything to-day; he snarled as he looked. He had left the door wide open, disdaining to shut it, and the breeze now became violent enough to knock off a dainty little china figure which Martha had prized, and which had cost several shillings. The little figure tottered, tumbled woefully on its stand, and then fell to the floor; it was broken into a thousand pieces. Jenkins crossed the room, picked up the pieces, and savagely flung them into the grate.

'Knick-knacks! Knick-knacks! Folly!' he cried. 'The whole room is hideous—dull carpet, dull paper; even the bed is not covered with an honest white quilt such as my mother would have knitted, but that *thing* on it!'

He apostrophised the poor bed-spread with a most indignant gesture. Then he walked up to the little

bookcase, took out a volume of Browning, glanced at it, and flung it with violent passion on the floor.

'It's all alike,' he said to himself; 'it's all alike. And so this is what I made my pile for, that one girl should insult me and that another should squander my money on things of that sort. I'll have no more of it. I'll let Martha go her own sweet way. I'll give her an allowance; yes, she is my niece, and she sha'n't starve. She shall go to a school—I'll find the sort of school that will knock some of the nonsense out of her, a school where she'll be taught to work the sampler, and to learn cookery and such things as an honest woman should know; and I'll pay for her. She shall spend her holidays there, and we'll give up this place. I'll have no more of this tomfoolery, for it is nothing else.'

His voice rose loud, his face grew redder than ever. 'I have never ventured into her sitting-room—it would make me sick if I did,' he said to himself; 'but I'll go down presently. I'm in the mood to get to the bottom of everything. I won't be insulted any longer, nor made a fool of. What did I work as I did for? Why did I lie under the stars at night and think of my mother, and of the time when I would come back rich and make the little girl called after her happy? Why did I do it? All because, forsooth! she must have a room like this. It's sickening—sickening! And she must have a friend who insults me and sells my presents.'

This last remark caused Jenkins to take the ring out of his pocket. With all his rage—and he was in a violent temper for the time being—he was essentially just. It was just possible, just possible there might

be a mistake. He now deliberately opened Martha's drawers; there were none of them locked. He wanted to find the duplicate ring in order to compare one with the other; he could not find it, however, for the simple reason that Martha at school was wearing it on her finger. She was fond of the ring; it was the one present which Uncle Tom had given her which she really appreciated. She was seldom seen without it. Jenkins quite forgot this fact as he rummaged amongst her treasures now.

Presently, having done all the mischief he could, having reduced the pretty, orderly chamber to chaos, he went downstairs and entered her sitting-room. Mrs Moore often took refuge in this quiet and beautiful room. She was there now; she was reading a novel.

Mrs Moore read commonplace novels, and greatly enjoyed them; in especial, she was very fond of Mrs Henry Wood. She was reading *Mrs Halliburton's Troubles* as Tom now entered the room. Mrs Henry Wood was just sentimental enough for Mrs Moore, and she always enjoyed her writings. She looked up as her brother came in, with a tear in the corner of her eye.

'Why—what is it, Tom?' she said. 'You here!'

'Yes, I'm here,' replied Jenkins; 'and why shouldn't I be here? Whose house is this, pray—yours or mine? Answer me; answer me.'

'My dear Thomas!'

Mrs Moore always had power over Thomas Jenkins. He looked a little ashamed of himself. 'Oh! I am cross,' he said; 'I'm cross, and I have cause to be. Forgive me, Polly; I didn't mean to be rude to you, old girl. I am looking for something—something of Martha's.'

'What is it? Perhaps I can help you.'

'No; you can't.'

'What's fretting you, Tom?'

'Something that I'm not going to talk about. What a sickening room this is; it's like her bedroom.'

'Oh, I like this room very much, Tom; it is so quiet and restful.'

'Quiet and restful! Fiddlesticks! I tell you its colours are enough to nauseate a man. Do you suppose my mother would sit in a room like this? My mother had common-sense. When she wanted a plain room she sat in the kitchen; when she wanted a grand room she sat in the dining-room or the drawing-room. She called the dining-room the parlour in her days, and she sat there. She had her samplers hung upon the walls, not those stupid, ridiculous pictures of women with long necks and long faces, and not made like any woman *I* ever saw. My mother had sense; she liked her bit of colour too—a nice bit of crimson or a bit of royal-blue; and green! do you call this green? My mother liked pea-green and myrtle-green —not this stuff. I don't know what they do with the greens in the present day; but somehow they make me downright sick. Then she liked red—not this thing.' Here he took up a terra-cotta cloth which lay upon a little table near.

'Oh, do be careful, Tom! You'll break that little ornament of Martha's.'

'Well, I broke a thing of hers upstairs, or rather the wind did. I'd like to know how many housemaids it must take to dust all the fal-lals in her rooms. But there's going to be an end to it.'

'What do you mean, Tom? You quite frighten me.'

'There's coming an end to it all, Polly. The girl sha'n't be ruined; the girl has got to inherit some of my pile, and she must be worthy of it. I am going to take her away from that day-school.'

'But why, Tom—why?'

'Because I don't like it, Polly, and that's why. We'll shut up this place. I sha'n't bother about letting it; if a tenant comes along, well and good. We'll dismiss the servants, and you and I will go abroad, and we'll put Martha to school. I'll scour England until I find the right sort for her—a school where they teach cooking and house-work, and the proper taste in colours, and how to make a sampler; and when she knows these things she'll be trained to be a proper wife for a good man. As it is—— My word, Polly, my head aches. I scarcely know what I am doing.'

Down sat Jenkins in the nearest chair; his face was almost purple, his blue eyes were bloodshot. His sister was alarmed about him.

'What has happened to you?' she said.

'I'm fretting, and I am in a horrible temper,' was his answer; 'and the less you say to me the better.'

Just then the sound of carriage-wheels was heard, and, a moment later, Martha, beautifully dressed in gray, and looking cool and sweet and pretty, entered the room.

'Oh, mother,' she said, 'we have got a half-holiday, and I am back earlier than usual. There's an hour before lunch, and I thought you'd like to come for a drive with me. Do, mother; it is such a lovely day.

Shall I run up for your things?—Oh, I didn't see you, Uncle Tom.'

'No, I dare say you didn't, Martha; and I'm not surprised. It requires very keen sight to see any one in this room, with its shaded blinds and greenery-yallery furnishings. But now that I am here, have the goodness to look at me.'

'Certainly, Uncle Tom.'

'Don't say "Certainly, Uncle Tom" in that tone. I don't want mincing words; I want actions. Where's that ring I gave you?'

'My pearl ring?'

'Yes, your pearl ring. I never gave you two rings. I'd give you any number if you wanted them—that is, I would have done it. Show me the pearl ring.'

Martha very slowly removed her glove. She then went as slowly up to her uncle, and held out the third finger of her right hand.

Jenkins looked at the ring. 'Take it off,' he said.

Martha did take it off.

'I'll give it back to you in a few minutes,' he said. He stalked out of the room.

'Why, mother, what is the matter with him?' said Martha, turning to her mother.

'I don't know, my love; he has quite frightened me. He has been in an awful state of mind. It's something Clarissa has done. She sent back the dress, that I know; but, bad as he was before he went out, he has been much worse since he returned. He is in a rage, my dear Martha, and you and I must be very careful.'

'Let him rage, mother. I am sick of all this.'

'Oh, my darling, you really do not understand.'

'I understand him; it is you who do not understand him, mother. He really is a terrible person, and'——

But just then the door burst open, and Jenkins reappeared.

'Take your ring,' he said. 'I have been up in your bedroom looking round for it. I didn't know you wore it.'

'I always wear it. I love my ring,' said Martha.

'You what?'

'I love it.'

'Dear, dear! You want to make game of me now at the last minute? Well, I'm proof against that sort of flattery. It has come a trifle too late. Ha! ha! Too late. Polly, I am going out. You'll see me again when I return—I don't know when that will be. Look out for me when I come back. Now, you may take your mother for a drive, Martha; and, mark my words, make the most of it. Make the most of the ponies, and the most of the little basket-carriage, and the most of all your wealth, for things are taking a turn. There are those who irritate Thomas Jenkins past bearing.'

CHAPTER XXX.

'THIS DAY WEEK.'

JENKINS was in such a towering rage, that for some time he scarcely knew what he was doing. He was a man with violent passions, although they were seldom roused. Once or twice in the course of his life he had given way, however, to ungovernable temper—only once or twice, for he really had, as a rule, considerable self-control. There was much that was good and excellent in him. He was rough, but he was true; he was very affectionate and very faithful to those he took a fancy to. There was nothing he would not have done for Clarissa: she had been kind to him when others had been inclined to snub him; that fact alone took his fancy. Now, everything had gone wrong, and his temper was roused to the utmost; he knew well that at such times there was nothing for it but to 'walk it off.'

'Not drive it off,' he said to himself, 'nor ride it off, but walk it off. I'll be all right presently. I'll be sore, sore as a bear that is beaten, sore as man could be; but I'll be quiet. I'll not thunder round nor frighten the folks; but I must go for a walk—a long, long walk.'

So he started off, determined to administer that cure to his raging spirit which he knew would alone prove effectual. He walked quickly. The day happened to be hot, and he had forgotten to put on his coolest hat. Soon his red face became redder, and then he had to mop it; and then at last, exhausted in body and much quieter in mind, he sat down under the shelter of a wide-spreading beech-tree which was just beginning to put on its tenderest green, and endeavoured to think out the situation. He would do as he said. He often said things in his passions which he carried out in his sincere moments. He would give up the house; he would cease to be a figure of fun for the stupid, silly, tiresome inhabitants of Upton. His pile should not be spent on them. As to Polly, she was still his little sister; she had been good to him, and comforted him long ago; she had always revered his mother's memory. He would be good to Polly, and take her with him. They would go away. Martha should enjoy herself, as she liked best, at her school; he would not pay too much for luxuries for her, but she should have fair-play. As to Clarissa, he washed his hands of her. She was a pretty lass, and had a taking way; but there was nothing true in her. She was more deceitful even than Martha; for Martha always did express her faults, and was quite frank in her dislike to her old uncle. But where should he and Polly go?

At first he thought of the Continent. 'But they *parlez-vous* there,' he said to himself, 'and I'm not in it. Best stick to the places where English is spoken. Polly and I would make fine figures of ourselves with the *parlez-vous* folk. Oh, none of the

Continent for me! Neither the German nor the French for me! I'm a plain-spoken Englishman. I know but one tongue, as did my mother before me. But where shall we go?'

It suddenly occurred to him that it would be a good plan if he and Polly went to the north of England. There were some relations of his mother's there who would be extremely glad if Thomas Jenkins settled in their midst.

'We'll give up grandeur,' he said to himself. 'We'll take a plain sort of farmhouse—much the same sort of house as my mother had; and Polly shall have a woman to do the rough work. We'll live plain. We were never meant to be grand—Polly and I; and in the evenings we'll talk about my mother. It will be as pleasant a life as could be thought out; and they will respect me up in the north because I have made my pile.'

He was cooler now; his temper was fast leaving him. He liked the idea of the farmhouse in the north of England, and his mother's relations clustering round and fussing about him, and Polly sitting in her parlour and ordering the wench about. He thought Annie would do very well for the wench. He would pay her well, and if she had too much to do he would get in another girl to help her. Annie was rather lost sight of at Jenkins Manor. Well, she should come to the fore again. She was a good little thing, very good and well meaning, and she appreciated him. Annie and his sister should go with him to the north; and there the memory of his mother should be enshrined in the heart of every soul who came across him, Thomas Jenkins. 'I have nothing

else to live for but her memory; it just comes to that,' he said to himself, and he squeezed a tear out of each of his blue eyes, and felt himself refreshed and something like a martyr in a good cause. 'I'll get rid of that valet, too,' he said; 'he shall go about his business. And I'll sell my fine clothes; it will be frieze on week-days and broadcloth on Sundays for Thomas Jenkins for the rest of his life. And I won't be taken in by a nice, dark-eyed pretty lass a second time.'

Just as these thoughts came to him he was attracted by a sound. He started to his feet, peered over the hedge, and saw something which immediately made the whole of his person quicken into action. He was carrying a stick; he seized it in his hand, vaulted over the hedge, and ran down the road. A number of boys and a little girl were forming a group; the boys surrounded the girl, and the girl was crying bitterly. The boys made loud, teasing remarks; the girl was clasping a wet puppy in her arms, the tears streaming down her cheeks. One or two boys were trying to drag the puppy away. The puppy uttered piercing yell after piercing yell.

'Come, none of that, you cowards!' cried Jenkins. He strode up to the boys.—'What's the matter, little one?' he said.

'Oh, Mr—Mr'—— said the child; 'oh! it's Mr Anticlimax. Oh, I am so glad!'

'Why, who are you?' said Jenkins. 'Who are you?'

'I am Janet Rodney; and they were drowning the little dog, and I wouldn't let them, and I saved it, and they'——

The girl was clasping a wet puppy in her arms.

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'You cowards!' said Jenkins. He raised his stick and approached one of the boys, who ran away with a yell, the others immediately following his example.

Poor little Janet now sobbed more bitterly than ever. The puppy, a miserable little wretch, dirty, uncombed, and of a mongrel type, sprawled piteously on the ground, adding its yells to the tears of the child.

'Come, come, little woman! come, come,' said Jenkins. Angry as he was with Clarissa, he could not be rude to her little sister. His heart beat a trifle faster as he looked at her.

Janet soon wiped away her tears. 'I was praying to God, and asking Him to send Mr Greatheart. You know who Mr Greatheart is—don't you?'

'Can't say I do. Who is he?' said Jenkins.

'Oh! he's that beautiful, beautiful man in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who helps every one. I prayed so hard, for the boys were surrounding me, and in a moment poor puppy would have been torn away, and they would have dr—drownded him.' The last words came out with a fresh sob.

'Well, and you prayed for Mr Greatheart, missy?'

'Yes; and you came, and you are just as good. I am very much obliged to you, Mr Anticlimax.'

'Don't call me by that silly name. Jenkins is my name—Thomas Jenkins.'

'Oh yes, I know all about you.' Poor Janet gave another little sob. 'I am so tired, and it is so hot,' she said. She looked around her. 'And, oh! Mr Jenkins, do you think puppy is very ill?'

'He is a poor little beast,' said Jenkins, picking up the puppy and examining it; 'not worth much.'

'He is worth a great deal,' said Janet. 'I have saved him; and he's a darling, an angel. Give him to me.'

She clutched the puppy fiercely from Jenkins's arms, smothered it up to her pretty gray dress, and kissed it on its forehead.

'Well, he is yours, I take it,' said Jenkins, 'to do what you like with. But how did you get on this road so far from home?'

'I was going on a message for Clare. I said I'd go; but she didn't know it. I thought I'd get to Mary Lancaster's house and back before the evening. Clarissa wants to see Mary. Clare is in great trouble.'

'Oh yes, I like that,' said Jenkins.

'Why do you speak in that tone?'

'I'll speak in any tone I please. You are not going to order me about, little missy.'

'You were very kind to me, Mr Jenkins, and I am most grateful,' said Janet.

'A little lass like you has no business walking along these country roads all by herself.'

'I never was frightened before,' replied Janet; 'but I saw the boys, and they were running with the little dog to the pond over there, and they tied a stone round its neck. And I shouted to them, and they were so astonished they stopped, and I snatched the dog away, and then they all said they would fight me.'

'You stood up against eight of 'em! You're plucky, little 'un,' said Jenkins. 'Now, I tell you what—you come and sit down and rest a bit. You're fairly stunned. How far is this Miss Lancaster's house?'

'About half a mile away. Do you see that house nestling in the trees?'

'The house with the smoke coming out of the chimney?'

'Yes. That's where she lives.'

'You are too tired to go any farther, missy.'

'No, I'm not; and Clare wants to see her awfully. She is in great, great trouble, and there's no one but me to help her—no one at all. She used to have Martha Moore before you came; but she has not even her now. Everything is against my own, own Clare, and I am going to help her if I can.'

'Everything against Clare—everything against poor, little Miss Clarissa,' said Jenkins under his breath. 'It didn't seem like it. I wonder if the little 'un is false too. I'd like to say a word or two to the girl; it seems a sort of Providence my coming across her like this.'

'Now, I tell you what it is, miss,' said Jenkins. 'Come and sit here, and we'll have a talk. I am very glad I was able to help you. I don't suppose the boys would have done much to you, but they would have taken this poor little beast and put an end to its life anyway.'

The puppy now was sufficiently recovered from its state of fright to lick Jenkins's hand. It licked it with its little tongue, and Jenkins patted it on its smooth, broad, white forehead.

'Once I had a puppy something like this,' he said, 'when I was in Australia. It used to sleep in my arms at night. Those were the nights when I slept under the stars.'

'Did you really sleep under the stars?' said Janet. 'How beautiful!'

'Well, yes; so it was,' said Jenkins, 'though most folks would not have said so. The puppy used to sleep in my arms, and I was fond of the poor little beast. He was killed by a snake at last.'

'Killed by a snake! Oh, how awful!'

'It was a good thing for me, little miss. The snake struck home at poor Bob instead of your humble servant.'

'And did Bob die at once?'

'Pretty nearly so. Poor little thing, he licked my hand at the last. I buried him under a briggalow-tree. I think of poor little Bob when I wake now and then at night.'

'You must have had a very exciting life, Mr Anti-climax,' said Janet.

'Well, I have had a life with a pretty good bit of adventure while I was making my pile.'

'What's your pile?'

'My money.'

'Have you a great lot of money?'

'Quantities and quantities. Not that money does much after all.'

'Doesn't it?' said Janet. 'I think it does. It seems to me that all the unhappiness in the world is because of money. As money has to be, I wish every one had an awful lot—that's what I do wish. Poor darling Clare, she wouldn't be unhappy if it weren't for money.'

'Now, look you here,' said Jenkins. 'I am a straight man, and I like to have things out. You say your sister, Miss Clarissa, is in trouble. Well, so am I; I'm in trouble too.'

'You?' said little Janet.

'Yes. What was that name you called me?'

'Mr Greatheart.'

'Well, then, if I'm your Mr Greatheart, I'm in a good bit of trouble at the present moment. I'm fretted and I'm puzzled; I don't know who to trust.'

'Why don't you trust everybody?' said little Janet. 'That's what I do.'

'Bless you, child! you've not lived as long as I have. I trust people till I find them out. I've been finding people out to-day.'

'Finding people out?' repeated Janet.

'Yes; and now I'll tell you a bit more. The person I have found out to-day—and it's that that has cut me to the quick—is your sister, pretty Miss Clarissa.'

'Oh dear! oh dear!' said Janet. 'You have found Clarissa out; but in what way?'

'That she is false—false as girl can be; and I thought a sight of her.'

'She's not!' said Janet, springing to her feet. 'I won't listen to you. My Clare is as true, as true as any girl. I hate you, Mr Jenkins. I won't call you Mr Greatheart any more. I hate you when you speak against Clare.'

Up jumped Janet, puppy in arms. She stamped her foot; her eyes blazed, her little face was crimson.

'All right, missy,' said Jenkins, who was partly amused, partly annoyed by the child's attitude. 'Have it your own way. How did this—look, missy, I believe you're in your sister's secrets—how did this get into Richardson's shop? I found it there this morning, and I bought it back again, for it's just a trifle too good for Richardson's customers. I bought it back, and it's mine now. How did it get there?'

Poor little Janet turned white as death; for Jenkins, pushing his hand into his waistcoat-pocket, produced the pearl ring on the top of his small finger.

'If you answer me—if you tell me how it got there—I'll be obliged to you. Will you, missy—will you?'

'I wish I could. I know, of course, and it is nothing wrong; but I—just—can't.'

Jenkins burst into a loud laugh.

'I believe you,' he said.

Janet thought for a moment, then she looked up at him.

'Mr Jenkins,' she said, 'you saved me, and I am grateful to you; and Clare likes you, and I like you because Clare does, and father likes you; but mother doesn't; but then you're not the sort of man mother could be expected to like.'

'Thank you, missy, very much—thank you.'

'And I like you, but I don't when you speak against Clare. You have found the ring, and I am very sorry you have found it. And will you give me just one week, Mr Jenkins, before you say anything to anybody else? And then, perhaps, I can tell you *everything*. Will you, Mr Jenkins—will you?'

'You are a queer little lass, but you do seem straight and honest. I expect you are too young to have got crooked yet. Well, yes. This is Thursday; this day week then.'

'This day week I will tell you; this day week I'll show you that there's *no one* like Clare. Oh, I will! I will!' said the child, and her little face became full of intense resolution.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A KITTEN WITH CLAWS.

'LARE!' said Janet.

'Yes,' replied Clarissa.

The two girls were seated in the back-room where the animals were kept. The weather was sufficiently hot now to have a portion of the window open, without even fear of the bullfinch getting cold. Clarissa had drawn a small wickerwork chair near the window, and was peering down, with her somewhat shortsighted eyes, at a German exercise which she was rapidly revising. Janet had her lesson-books also before her; but, truth to tell, she was not busy.

'Yes,' said Clarissa now somewhat impatiently. 'I want to get this theme through before bed-time. Is it very important, Janey?'

'It is,' replied Janet, 'very. Can you tell me how to spell "nonentity"?'

'How to spell "nonentity"? Why, of course.' Clarissa spelt the word. Janet listened to her gravely.

'Hold a minute,' she said, 'and let me write it down.' She did write it down. A look of intense relief came over her face.

'Well,' said Clarissa, 'anything else?'

'No; that's all,' replied Janet.

Clarissa looked at her in mild wonder for a minute, and then went on with her occupation.

Janet presently slipped out of the room. Clarissa was feeling sad and puzzled as girl could be. She hated beyond words the feeling that she had offended Mr Jenkins, perhaps for life; but there was no help for it. She was forced to obey her mother; and even now Mrs Rodney was very displeased and cold in her manner. She could not understand Clarissa's conduct about the dress.

Meanwhile Janet skipped upstairs to her own room. 'I was puzzling it out all the time; but I could not get hold of a dictionary, and I might have spelt it wrong,' she thought. 'Now it is all right.' She entered the attic bedroom, pulled out her little writing-case, opened her bottle of ink, and spread a sheet of paper before her. She wrote with extreme care and very boldly. Her lines were not straight—she wrote zigzag across the paper; but whatever she said seemed to give her intense satisfaction, for she pursed up her small lips, and rosy spots came into her cheeks. The letter was signed, when at last it was finished, with the magical words, 'Little Miss Nonentity.'

'That will do,' thought Janet; 'that will be sure to do.'

She put it into an envelope, addressed it to Mr George Sarson, having secured his address from a visiting-card which she had seen in her father's possession earlier in the day. She had a few pence in her pocket, and now she put on her hat, ran out unknown to any one, went to the post-office, bought a

stamp, put it on the letter, and dropped it into the little receptacle for that purpose outside the post-office. She then went home.

During the rest of the evening her spirits were almost disagreeably high. Clarissa thought it was on account of the puppy. Janet had mentioned her adventure with the puppy, and had brought it back with her; and Mrs Rodney, who, although she was angry with Clarissa, never really liked to be unkind to either of her girls, was wonderfully patient about the puppy, and gave Janet leave to keep it in the kitchen if cook would be kind enough to look after it. Of course cook was kind enough, and Janet felt that her world was very much richer than it had been that morning.

Clarissa's spirits, however, would not rise; and as the girls were going to bed that night she found her little sister's attitude almost tiresome.

'I wish you would keep still, Janey,' she said. 'I have a headache, and you do toss about so.'

'It 's 'cos I 'm so happy,' said Janet.

Clarissa looked at her in wonder. 'I suppose you think that puppy puts everything straight?' she said. 'I never saw you so unsympathetic before. Did you say that Mary Lancaster would come to see me?'

'She has a cold, or she would have been round this evening; but she will see you at school as soon as ever she is well enough to return,' was Janet's answer. 'But, oh! never mind, Clare darling, it will be all quite right in a week; it will be all perfectly right in a week.'

As Clarissa had not got the clue to this remarkable utterance on the part of Janet, she could not take

much comfort from it, and presently the two girls fell asleep.

It was on the following morning that the letter which had caused Janet so many exercises of thought reached its destination. Mr George Sarson was seated at breakfast when it was handed to him with a pile of other letters. Most of these were from learned professors like himself. There was one which contained information with regard to the next move in a game of chess he was playing with an opponent in the United States. He pondered this for a long time, said 'Ha! ha!' and seemed deeply interested. He read all his letters one after the other before he attacked the one written by little Janet. At last he took it up and peered at it through his spectacles.

'Queer, unformed writing,' he said to himself. 'It is strange how handwriting is degenerating. This is peculiarly unformed. I wonder which of my learned friends has sent it to me. Better than the typewriter, however; anything is better than the typewriter. There ought to be a law to fling all typewritten letters into the wastepaper basket. But still, the writing is very unformed.'

He opened the letter slowly and deliberately. He never tore his letters open; he kept a small paper-knife for the purpose, cutting the envelope across the top of the flap. He cut it now as deliberately as usual. His egg—he always had two eggs for breakfast—two eggs with toast and tea were his invariable matutinal meal from one end of the year to the other—he left to get cold while he took Janet's sheet of paper out of its envelope. He read it with an expression of extreme amazement on his face. It ran as follows:

'DEAR MR SARSON,—Please, you said that if I was in great trouble you would help me. I am in great trouble, and so is Clare. Please come, I want you so bad. "LITTLE MISS NONENTITY."'

'Goodness gracious!' cried Sarson. He let the sheet of paper fall to the floor; then he stooped to pick it up, and his face got red with the action. 'Who in the name of fortune is "Little Miss Nonentity"?' he said to himself. '"Little Miss Nonentity"!' He rubbed his forehead and pushed his glasses up. His face wore an expression of blank bewilderment. 'I have not the slightest doubt it is from a female,' he said; and then he dropped the letter as though it stung him, and then he rose and walked to the fireplace. A small fire burned in the grate, although the days were turning warmer. He stood with his back to the fire, and his blue eyes grew rounder and rounder. 'I am to help somebody — a woman, a female. Little Miss Nonentity! Now I remember a little child, a creature, to be sure, to be sure. Nice little thing—kitten-like, quite nice, quite an agreeable little girl—*girl*, scarcely that. Little Miss Nonentity—my name for her. She remembered it; nice little thing. But what does she want me to do?'

He read the letter over again.

'I did make her some sort of promise,' he said to himself. 'Oh, George Sarson, what a person of impulse you are, and how you repent afterwards! Why, in the name of fortune, did I promise to help a creature that will grow into a woman! It's quite horrible. But it's plain I must keep my word; I never yet did break it. I must help her. She wants

it, she asks for it, dear Little Miss Nonentity—troublesome, torturing Little Miss Nonentity; but, all the same, my word is given, and my word is my bond. What an awful nuisance this is! She lives in Upton; she is Rodney's child. Poor Rodney! he married and doomed himself for life; and she is one of his offspring, poor kitten. It 's awkward. I must go to Upton —Upton, that hateful, flat place. I cannot get the elevation to inhale there. I cannot get the air that I require; and I am busy, frightfully busy—several lectures to attend to, and Stephens and Warner both begging of me to help them. Important news with regard to the mummy of one of the Pharaohs; and Little Miss Nonentity, forsooth, requires me. A childish trouble, a fit of temper, or a broken doll. Shall I send the servant out to buy her a doll and send it by post? Perhaps that will do. Little creatures like dolls. I have always heard it—just what one might expect from their pap-like brains; but, stay, she asks me to come. I must obey her; no help for it.'

He did not finish his egg; he left his tea untasted. He rang his bell sharply; his servant—a man, nothing would induce him to have a woman in the house—obeyed his summons.

'Sampson, pack my portmanteau.'

'Yes, sir. For what hour, sir?'

'The next train to Upton. Look out the trains.'

'Yes, sir. You won't then, sir, go to University College to-day?'

'I 'm going to Upton. Pack the portmanteau.'

Sampson disappeared. 'Wonder what 's up?' he said to himself.

Meanwhile Sarson paced up and down the floor.

'I had best wire to them. Stay, I might wire to Little Miss Nonentity; it sounds rather ludicrous, but I cannot call the creature by any other name. If she were older than she is I would almost break my word; almost, not quite. No need to consider that, however, for I never should have spoken a single word to the creature. And who on earth is Clare? Hope to goodness it's a boy. I can't interfere if it's a girl; I simply cannot. Well, Little Miss Nonentity, you've got me into a scrape; but my word is my word.'

He went out, and after consideration decided to telegraph to Rodney. His telegram was brief and to the point:

'Will be at Upton by the train which arrives at 1.50.—GEORGE SARSON.'

He took the next train to Upton and arrived at the time he stated. He walked from the station to the Rodneys' house.

Mrs Rodney had received news that he was coming, and was not too well pleased. 'To tell the truth,' she said to her husband, 'I am not particularly taken with Mr Sarson. He is a most peculiar man; and we owe him nothing, you know, James, for he did not pay for the doctor.'

'He certainly did not; but he is the best fellow in existence,' said Rodney. 'I am delighted he is coming. There are a great many things I have to talk over with him.'

'Oh! whatever pleases you, dear, pleases me,' said the wife. 'I know exactly the kind of lunch he likes; and he will spend most of the time with you in your study. There certainly never was a man who more disliked the society of the other sex.'

'Yes, he is a confirmed woman-hater, poor Sarson,' replied Rodney.

Janet came in soon after the arrival of the telegram. She had a headache, and was not allowed to go to school that morning.

'What is it, mother?' she said eagerly.

'What is what, Janet? Don't be so curious. Run out into the garden, now that your head is better, and pick some flowers. Mr Sarson is coming to lunch.'

'Oh, mother!' cried Janet, 'is it true?'

'It is true. What a very peculiar way you are acting. Professor Sarson does not want to see you.'

'Yes, but I 'spect he does,' said Janet.

Mrs Rodney turned to her husband. 'What are these two girls coming to?' she said; 'Clare to act in the disgraceful, unladylike way she did the other night, and now Janet absolutely thinking that the poor Professor is coming to see her.'

'Poor little Janey! He certainly could not be worried talking to her,' said the other Professor. 'Well, I must go out now, Miriam; but I shall be back in good time for lunch.'

Punctual to the moment, Professor Sarson made his appearance. Mrs Rodney was in the hall. He arrived in some excitement; he was wearing his blue glasses.

'How do you do, madam?' he said. 'Where is Miss Nonentity?'

'Miss—who?' said Mrs Rodney. 'Oh, I remember you spoke in an extraordinary way just before you left. I really do not know who Miss Nonentity is.'

'Your youngest, madam, your youngest—the kitten-like creature—I want to see her. I have come here on purpose.'

'How extraordinary!' said Mrs Rodney under her breath. 'Then little Janet was right. What does this mean?—My husband will be delighted to see you,' she said aloud; 'he is out for the present. Would you like to come and wait for him in his study?'

'I don't mind where I wait, madam, if only Miss Nonentity will come quickly.'

'Oh! I will send her to you—you mean my little Janet.'

'I mean the creature,' cried Sarson. He marched into the study, having forgotten to remove his hat.

'He really becomes more boorish each time,' thought Mrs Rodney; but she did not utter her thoughts aloud.

Janet was in the garden. Janet was on the tiptoe of expectation. Dear Mr Sarson had not failed her; he was coming. Oh, this was exciting! She would be able to help Clare now; she would be able to put everything right. Just then her mother's voice was heard calling, 'Janet! Janet!'

'Yes, mother,' answered the little girl. She came bounding across the smoothly-kept lawn.

'The Professor has come and would like to see you. Just go and talk to him a little until your father arrives.'

Janet's small face crimsoned. She was too excited to say, 'I knew he would want to see me.' She ran at once into the room, just as she was—untidy, with a mud stain on her cheek and a hole in her stocking. Had Mrs Rodney seen that hole, she would have sent Janet to change her stockings; but fortunately she had not noticed it.

The Professor was still wearing his blue spectacles.

He looked across the room, then he took his glasses off and put them on the mantelpiece. 'Now,' he said. He went towards the child. 'I said I would help you if I could, and I am keeping my word. What do you want with me?'

'Won't you sit down?' said Janet.

'It doesn't matter,' said the Professor, 'whether I sit or whether I stand. You want me to help you. Now, out with it. I can't stand going round a subject; fire straight, little 'un—out with your trouble. If I can help you I will.'

'Then it's this,' said Janet; 'it is this. I want you, please, to give Clare forty pounds at once. I want you to give her forty pounds, and not to ask her any questions. Will you, Mr Sarson?'

'Who is Clare?'

'My sister.'

'A girl?'

'Well, yes, of course.'

'I can't look at her. I can't see her. You don't want me to see her—do you?'

'No; I want you to give her forty pounds.'

'You must tell me why. I am not ungenerous, and I have plenty of money; but I never part with it without a cause. Why am I to give your sister forty pounds?'

'It's because of father. Father thinks—or he did think, and mother thinks—or she did think, that you paid Sir John Carbery.'

'Oh!' said George Sarson, 'I have puzzled over that. May I ask why they thought that?'

'Won't you sit down?' said little Janet.

Professor Sarson had now completely forgotten

himself; he did sit down. Janet came close to him; she began softly to stroke one of his hard brown hands. He found the stroke touching, and somehow comforting. He put one hand over the little soft hand of Janet's.

'You are very like that kitten of mine that died years ago,' he said.

'May I sit on your lap?' asked Janet.

'Yes, little creature; yes, jump up. Put your arms round my neck. I will forget that you are a girl. Kiss me; rub your little cheek against mine. You are a very soft little thing—very, very kitten-like. And so you thought I would help you—poor, rough, old George Sarson, the woman-hater? It was nice of you, Little Miss Nonentity. Let me tell you you had remarkable faith.'

'But you said it,' answered Janet. 'When people say a thing they mean it—don't they?'

'People worth anything do. Now then, you want me to give you forty pounds?'

'Not me, but Clare.'

'I don't know Clare.'

'Clarissa, my sister.'

'A grown-up creature?'

'Well, nearly grown-up.'

'Horror!' said Professor Sarson. He shivered slightly. 'I can have nothing to do with her,' he said after a pause; 'you are not to bring her here, and you are not to allow her to speak to me. I dislike women; I hate them.'

'It's very rude of you,' said Janet; 'it's very horrid of you. You needn't boast about it.'

'Oh come, kitty, kitty! don't show your claws.

Now then, kitty, quiet, quiet.' He stroked Janet on her shoulder. She laughed.

'You are so funny,' she said. 'I like you. Clare doesn't, nor does mother; but I do.'

'Come, come, kitty; claws again? You are not to tell me who likes me and who doesn't.'

'I will tell you who likes you. I do. I began by not liking you, 'cos you're so rude—you're like a bear. You're the very rudest man I ever heard of.'

'Delicious!' said Sarson. 'Nearly as good as an elevation to breathe in. Say some more, Little Miss Nonentity. By the way, you are becoming strangely unlike your name.'

Janet laughed. 'I don't mind what I say,' she answered. 'I'll tell you plain truths, 'cos I'm'——

'What?'

'Frank.'

'You are a kitten with claws, and you certainly use them. Never mind, as long as you are a kitten. Now then, go on. You want me to give you—we'll say it's you—forty pounds. What for?'

'I'll have to speak about Clarissa,' said Janet; 'and you're not to scold, you are not to interrupt, and you are to listen. It don't matter whether you hate or whether you don't hate her; she doesn't care. But you have got to listen.'

'I am listening. Have the goodness to jump off my knee and fetch me my blue glasses—the glare from that garden outside is intolerable. You ought to wear blue glasses yourself, little miss—good for the eyes, very good for the eyes.'

'Oh, my eyes are quite, quite strong, thank you,' replied Janet; but she jumped off the Professor's

knee, fetched the glasses, and assisted him, much to his embarrassment, but also secretly to his delight, to arrange them across his eyes. 'Just so,' she said, 'that's the way they look best. Now then, are you comfy? Are you able to glare at me without blinking?'

'Come, come; claws again? Now then, set to work and tell me your story.'

'It was this way,' said Janet. She paused, and then began rapidly: 'Father was so ill—dying, you know—and Clare and I—— Oh, we were so sad! Oh, we were wretched! Fancy two girls'——

'I couldn't fancy it, Nonentity. Don't ask me.'

'Well, fancy two people who loved him—oh! so much'—Janet stretched out both her arms wide—'as much as that, and a million times more, and we could do nothing; and Clare'——

'Let us imagine that Clare is a boy,' said the Professor suddenly.

'No, I won't do nothing of the sort.—And Clare said that she would do something. Clare is clever; she's like a boy in her cleverness at any rate; and she had got a scholarship.'

'Ah!' said the Professor. He was interested in scholarships. He did not fidget quite so much, and he put his arm a little more securely round Janet's waist. 'Stroke my hand while you talk to me,' he said; 'it's very soothing.'

Janet did stroke it for a moment or two, then she stopped.

'I don't want to soothe you,' she said; 'I want you to keep wide, wide awake. Well, Mr Sarson, my darling, clever Clare got the scholarship—the Randall

Scholarship at the Drummond Day-school. It was a great thing to win, and she thought—poor darling Clare did—that she would get the money.'

'As a rule people do,' said the Professor.

'Clare thought she would; and father was so ill, and Clare and I made a plot. And Clare saw the doctor, and Dr Bennett said, "If Sir John Carbery comes your father may get well; but if Sir John Carbery doesn't come your father will certainly die." Then Clare said, "Why don't you send for him?" and Dr Bennett said, "Your father won't allow me; he cannot pay the fee—the fee is thirty-five guineas."'

'Did he really?' said Mr Sarson. 'Madness—madness; and I was there, his old friend, his greatest friend, and hundreds lying idle in the bank. Terrible! Surprised at Rodney.' He was so angry now that he jumped up, forgetting Janet, who tumbled on the floor. He removed his blue glasses; his eyes emitted sparks of fire. 'Terrible!' he repeated.

Janet looked up at him in wonder. 'When you have done saying "Terrible!" I'll go on,' she remarked.

The Professor put on his glasses again. 'Well, proceed,' he said.

'Clare and I were in a state; and then Clare said, "I'll do it. I'll get Sir John Carbery to come, and I'll pay him out of my scholarship."'

'Good! Capital! Brave boy! Capital boy!' said Mr Sarson.

'But it was a girl.'

'Now, don't spoil things, Nonentity. Proceed. And the boy did it—did he?'

'You are too funny,' said Janet. 'Clare went to

town. She told nobody; she went off all alone. But, first of all, do you know that she became a thief?'

'What! what! What is that you're saying?'

'She had to. She opened the missionary money-box and took out a whole sovereign. She had to pay her railway-fare to town—hadn't she?'

'Quite so; poor fellow.'

'Oh! you get funnier and funnier,' said Janet; 'but I like you—I do.'

'Go on, Nonentity; go on.'

'She took the money, and she went to town, and nobody knew. And she saw Sir John Carbery, and she told Sir John that he must come, and Sir John said he would; and she told him that he must never, never tell who had sent him, and he promised he would not. He said he would just say a friend; and he came, and he cured father.'

'Well, well! Capital boy that—capital boy!' said Mr Sarson.

'And father thought it was you, you know. Father thought it was you; and now I want it to be you. It's the only way out.'

'The only way out, kitten? What do you mean?'

'Clare, my darling pet, has got into such trouble; for what do you think? When she came home she heard that they were not going to give any money at all for the scholarship; they were going to give her a lot of stupid, stupid lessons. And poor Clare—oh, she was nearly wild with misery!'

'But why didn't you write to me then? Why didn't he come to me? I would have given him three times—four times—the money.'

'It's a girl, you know,' said Janet.

'You are too irritating, kitten. I cannot stand much more of this. Yes; and what is up now? Was Sir John paid? If not, I shall make a point of going to him to-morrow. Upon my word it will relieve me. If I had known for a single instant that my greatest friend Rodney was so ill, and that I was not told that he was too poor to get the best advice that could be given to him, why, I would have nearly lost my senses. Rodney! sacrifice a brain like that! You madden me, kitten—you madden me.'

'I am very glad,' said Janet. 'It is what I wanted to do.'

'Well, you have claws; but what next? Was Sir John Carbery ever paid?'

'Oh, indeed he was. Do you think my Clare would go back on her word? She managed it in such a funny way. There is a queer, rough diamond here—a very odd man, who likes Clare.'

'H'm! Well, what next?'

'He is a Mr Jenkins, and I call him Mr Anticlimax.'

'I don't see any wit in that remark. Go on.'

'Well, he gave Clare a ring because he likes her—because she has been nice to him—a pearl ring, and it cost a good deal; and Clare sold it and got the money and paid Sir John Carbery.'

'Well, well; she sold the ring? Then what do you want me for?'

'Because she has got into dreadful trouble now. She has offended poor, kind Mr Jenkins, who has discovered that she sold the ring, and doesn't know why she did; and he is going away, and he is going to do—oh! no end of mischief, and make a lot of people unhappy; and Clare can never, never forgive

herself. I promised him yesterday that I would put things right in a week, and that I would take a week to do it. So you have got to help me. Sit down; I am going to jump on your lap, and I am going to hug you till you say "Yes." Now then, here I am.'

And Sarson did drop into a chair, and Janet did spring into his lap and put her soft arms round him, and kissed him and hugged him, and looked into his eyes and said, 'I don't care how many women you hate; you don't hate me, and you've got to give me forty pounds, and to say nothing about it to nobody.'

Professor Sarson was quite silent for a minute or two. 'I think there is a better way out than that,' he said. 'The doctor was paid, and after a fashion your Clare, the young fellow we have been talking about, paid him. It would anything but please that same young creature if I were now to interfere.'

'But you must interfere; things are quite too dreadful.'

'Then I tell you what, Nonentity. You and I must put our heads together and think out a plan. There is to me a much more simple solution of the whole difficulty.'

'What is that?'

'Whisper. Come close to me, kitten, and I'll tell it to you in your ear.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARTHA SEIZES HER OPPORTUNITY.

WHILE these events were taking place at the Rodneys' house, and Professor Sarson, notwithstanding his avowed hatred of women, was coming more and more under the fascinations of 'the kitten,' things had taken a very different turn at Jenkins Manor; for Jenkins, although for a time he had also been soothed by the words of little Janet, and had faithfully promised the child that he would take no extreme steps for a week, had by no means got over his bad temper. He was determined, as he expressed it, that one person at least should learn her lesson; and as that person happened to be his own niece, and as Martha had always possessed a spirit of her own, things were not too tranquil at the mansion.

The first thing Jenkins did during his sway of despotism was to forbid his sister to go into 'the greenery-yallery room,' as he called Martha's sitting-room.

'You don't go there,' he said. 'There 's one thing I stipulated for when I brought you here out of your poverty and placed you at the head of my establish-

ment, and that was that I was to be master. I don't at all know how things will go on. I am very fond of you, Polly, and I don't want ever to leave you nor you to leave me; but there are changes ahead, and those changes will quite prevent miss having any further use of that objectionable room which she has furnished for herself.'

Now, as miss happened to hear this remark, and as she happened, perhaps with little wisdom, to toss her head in the air and to walk out of the gorgeously and hideously furnished drawing-room, Jenkins's face grew redder than ever.

'You must bear with her, Tom,' said his sister.

'Bear with her?' he replied. 'I am tired of bearing with her. I have done nothing but bear with her since I came home. I tell you what it is, Polly; I wish to goodness you'd change her name. Can't you call her Susan or Mary, or anything but Martha? Martha is a sacred name to me, and I hate to hear it called to a girl who is as unlike my dear mother as night is unlike day.'

'All the same, it is her name,' replied Mrs Moore, now showing a spark of spirit of her own; 'and I am afraid you must put up with it.'

'So it seems,' he answered; 'so it seems. A man makes his pile and dreams of his relations, and thinks of the gay times he'll have when his pile is made and he is spending it for them; but they laugh at him, and order him about, and fret him to the verge of distraction. I wish I could tell some of the other poor fellows who were working day and night to help their dear ones at home, as they called 'em, that their dear ones might not be so very, very dear when the

time came to spend money on 'em. I wish I could see 'em and tell 'em—yes, that I do.'

This state of things lasted for a whole day; but on the morning of the second day Jenkins, who had slept over many things during the night, made an announcement which brought a certain amount of relief with it.

'I am going away by the first train this morning,' he said. 'I am going away for several days. It don't matter where I go or what I do. I'll be back by Thursday morning, for on that day things come to a crisis.'

'But how so, Tom?' asked his sister.

'I'm not going to tell you how so, Polly; I only repeat a fact that on that day things come to a crisis. There will be no more pearl rings put up in jewellers' shops to be bought by any one who happens to pass by; there'll be no more dresses ordered for one young lady and worn by another; there'll be no more parcels returned to me with rude notes, as much as to say, "I'll use your money when I want it, and I'll fling it back in your face when I don't." All these things will be altered on Thursday next. Now, this happens to be Monday. I'll be back on Wednesday night or Thursday morning at the latest. You can do as you please in the interval; only Martha—look at me, Martha.'

'Yes, Uncle Tom,' replied Martha.

'I'm going to take you from that day-school. I am going to put you out to board.'

'Thank you, Uncle.'

'You needn't say "Thank you" in that satirical spirit. I shall put you out to board in a school where you will learn the sampler, and how to use your hands

—how to brew and how to bake, how to clean rooms, and how to keep dust at bay; and when you are trained, as I hope you will be, then perhaps a good fellow will marry you, and you 'll leave the country, which is about the best thing that can happen as far as your affectionate uncle is concerned.'

With these words, Jenkins left the room, slamming the door after him. Martha turned to her mother.

'Mother,' she said, 'do you really think I am going to bear this sort of thing? Uncle Tom is past enduring.'

'He is very, very troublesome at the present moment,' owned Mrs Moore. 'I don't wonder, Martha, my darling, that you are tried; I, who love him and know how good he is at heart, am also tried much by his manner. It is all owing to that unfortunate action on the part of Clarissa. Why did you allow her to wear the dress, Martha? That was the beginning of the trouble.'

'Really, mother, I cannot stand this. I meant no harm. I hated wearing it myself. I don't see why Uncle Tom, although he is rich, should make my life a misery. I am dependent on him, and he worries me about everything. He won't even let you come and sit with me in my darling sitting-room; and it was horrid of him to go into my bedroom. Oh, mother dear, I can't endure it; you will have to let me go.'

'No, no, Martha; it would break my heart to part with you.'

'It has come to it, mother,' said Martha; 'you must choose between me and Uncle Tom. I cannot stand Uncle Tom any longer.'

'But I must have you both,' said Mrs Moore.

'You must choose between us, mother. I am not going to be ordered about, nor worried, nor made wretched in the future. It may have been Clarissa's fault, and it may have been my fault; but whoever it was things are past bearing. He is so silly too, mother; he talks such utter nonsense. He cannot find the sort of school he means to send me to; and if he did I shouldn't go. It is not as if I were a baby, mother; I shall be seventeen my next birthday.'

'Be patient—be patient, my darling; things will come right in the end. I wish I could see Clarissa; I might have a talk with her. It is she who has put him into this terrible temper.'

'It was very wrong of her to sell the ring; but I think I know why she did it,' said Martha. 'Poor Clare, I have not been half sympathising enough with her. The fact is, mother, since Uncle Tom came I have been changing, and changing for the worse. I have not taken half so much interest in my lessons. I have been thinking of my riches, and sometimes I have put on little airs which have been so detestable and unladylike; and now I am being punished, for Uncle Tom with his riches is past bearing, and without Uncle Tom I am a penniless girl.'

'At any rate we shall have a few happy days together,' said Mrs Moore; 'we can do just what we like while he is away. And oh! there he goes,' she added. She got up as she spoke and walked towards the window.

Jenkins was mounting a mail-phaeton drawn by a pair of spirited bays. He took the reins, laid the whip with smart emphasis about the necks of his

steeds, and the next instant was flying down the avenue.

'Dear, dear! He drives in such a reckless way, I should not be a bit surprised if he had an accident some day,' said Mrs Moore. 'Poor dear Tom! poor dear fellow! he always had that extraordinary temper. He could not be driven; no one ever could drive him. He had to be led. Now, Clarissa manages him quite nicely; and he is never cross with me. Of course, I know Clare made him very angry when she sold his ring; but if you would only treat him as Clarissa does!'

'I cannot, mother; it is useless. I am not made like Clarissa; and then she has nothing to do with him. It is easy to be pleasant to a person for half-an-hour or even an hour; it is quite different to be pleasant always.'

'Well, let us be happy during the few days left to us,' said Mrs Moore; and Martha assented in a half-hearted manner. She went out into the garden. It was so early still that it was not time to start for school. The air was fresh and fragrant—delicious air, soft with the promise of summer.

Presently Martha went into the house, put on her hat, and walked to school. As she was going, her mother called out after her, 'Why don't you take the carriage and ponies?'

'I must get accustomed to walking,' was the girl's answer, and she started off. On her way there she met one of the teachers, a nice, pretty girl of the name of Miss Rosalie Gray. She stopped and spoke to Martha.

'You don't look well,' she said. 'I suppose you are

tired after your very gay party the other night. How beautiful everything was!'

'Yes, things looked rather nice,' assented Martha.

'And how charming Clarissa Rodney was in that fascinating dress; she really is quite a beauty. I never was more struck with any one.'

Martha was silent.

'By the way,' said Miss Gray after a pause, 'I may be leaving the Drummond School at the end of this term.'

'Why so?' asked Martha.

'Because I have heard of an extremely nice post in Southampton. There are two teachers wanted—one quite young, a sort of pupil-teacher; and the other an experienced teacher like myself. Even the pupil-teacher gets twenty pounds a year and all her expenses found; whereas the other teacher gets a hundred a year. I only get eighty here; and, besides, the school is so big that I am constantly overworked.'

Martha's face looked strangely eager. 'Did you say they wanted a pupil-teacher too?' she asked.

'Yes. Why? What is the matter? Do you know any one who would suit?'

'I do, Miss Gray; I do. Listen to me for a minute. Do you think, by any chance, they would take me?'

'You, my dear Miss Moore—you?' Miss Gray turned in absolute astonishment to face Martha. 'Are you talking nonsense?' she said; 'are you joking with me?'

'I am not joking; I am in sober earnest,' replied Martha. 'The fact is, Miss Gray, things are intoler-

able at home. Oh, I must confide in you, for I think you can help me. I want to go away before my uncle returns.'

'Before that nice, pleasant gentleman, Mr Thomas Jenkins, returns? But is he away?'

'Yes, he went away this morning. He makes things unhappy for me; he does not suit me, and I don't suit him. Mother is fond of him; if she is alone with him she will be quite happy. Do—do, dear Miss Gray, help me to get this post. You know all the ropes. Do assist me.'

Miss Gray, flattered by Martha's confidence, did at last agree somewhat unwillingly to give her the address of the school at Southampton.

Martha determined to go there herself. 'When you want a thing done, do it yourself,' was a motto which she had been fond of uttering from time to time. She told Miss Gray that whatever happened she would be careful not to mention her name. Going into school in renewed spirits, she there met Clarissa, who looked pale and depressed. Clarissa and she more or less avoided each other; but towards the end of school they met for a moment or two.

Clarissa longed to ask Martha something about the ring—how her uncle had found it, and what he had said to her—but an unusual reserve kept her silent. There was an expression in Martha's face which she observed and dreaded to meet. The girls were silent at first, then Martha said abruptly:

'Well, Clare, I may as well be bidding you good-bye.'

'Good-bye! What do you mean?' said Clarissa.

'I am not likely to be here long; but never mind.

When you hear that I am missing, make no comment. Things have come to a crisis.'

'Janet is also talking about a crisis, but she is not at all in low spirits,' was Clarissa's answer. 'That dear, funny man about whom I told you, Mr George Sarson, has been with us. He stayed with us for a couple of hours, and has gone away again; and father has been wondering what in the world he came about. Janet is bursting with importance, but won't utter a word; only she talks of a crisis on Thursday.'

'A crisis on Thursday!' cried Martha. 'Why, that is the day Uncle Tom is returning, and he also said there would be a crisis on Thursday. How ridiculous; but, of course, there is nothing in it. At any rate it does not matter to me.'

Clarissa longed to question further, but did not do so; and Martha went home.

That evening she spoke to her mother. 'Do you happen to have a little money about you, mother?' she asked.

'Well, darling, I am afraid I have not. Your uncle, generous as he is, never gives me ready cash. When I ask him—and I really should like to have an allowance to spend exactly as I pleased—his invariable answer is, "Order what you like, order what you like; but don't worry me about cash down, for it doesn't suit me."'

'Well, but have you nothing, mother—nothing?'

'I dare say I could manage a pound or two,' was Mrs Moore's remark; 'but why do you want money, Patty?'

'I'll tell you to-morrow evening, mother dear. Will

you lend me that pound or two, or, better still, give it to me?'

'You shall have it, of course, dearest; but, oh! I do beseech of you, do nothing rash.'

'I won't do anything rash, mother. I have thought over things, and I am certain your happiness and mine too will be best secured by what I intend to do. You must trust me, dearest mother; I will do nothing, nothing without letting you know. You will know all to-morrow evening.'

The next morning early, Martha took 'French leave' of her school and went by train to Southampton. She had looked up her *Bradshaw* to good purpose, and could get to that seaport town across country from Upton. She arrived there a little after noon, and went straight to the school which Miss Rosalie Gray had told her of. It was a large school facing the sea. There were about seventy boarders at Milton House, and a good number of resident teachers.

Martha was conducted, on presenting her card, into the headmistress's presence, who questioned her closely on her different attainments.

'You have had no experience in teaching then?' she said finally.

'No, I am still at school; but I could come to you at the half-term. I believe I could teach all that you require. I am fairly popular with other girls, and I certainly have the knack of imparting knowledge.'

Miss Mason, the headmistress, was struck with Martha's appearance. There was something very firm and dignified about the young girl when she pleased. She considered for a moment, and then said she would require references.

'I can give them, of course,' said Martha proudly. 'Professor Rodney, amongst others, will speak for me.'

'Oh, indeed,' said Miss Mason, brightening. 'Do you know Professor Rodney?'

'Yes; his daughter is one of my greatest friends.'

'Then that alone nearly clinches matters. If he will give you a testimonial for character and proficiency I need not go any further. But come, it is all-important to know how you can teach. I shall ask Miss Gibson to resign her class in your favour, and will ask you to take the pupils.'

This was decidedly an ordeal; but Martha had sufficient courage to undertake it. She acquitted herself not only well, but with distinction; and Miss Mason was now more and more inclined to try her. 'This is a peculiarly advantageous berth,' she said. 'As a rule pupil-teachers get no salary; but in your case I am prepared to give you twenty pounds a year —not much, but enough to pay for your travelling expenses and perhaps pocket-money.'

'It is quite sufficient,' replied Martha, 'and I am very much obliged to you.'

'You will of course have the advantage of speaking French and German with the head-pupils, and will thus be able to perfect yourself in languages, which I already see you know very well. In addition, you can have lessons in music and in any other accomplishment which you like best: you have but to say. During the mornings your time will be engaged attending to the younger classes, and in the afternoons you will be expected to go out with them; but I will myself promise that you shall have sufficient time to attend to those studies which you wish to take up.'

'Thank you,' replied Martha; then she added, 'I sha'n't want too much time. I am not in favour of overmuch learning; and often think I worked too hard when I was a child.'

Had Martha made this extraordinary speech earlier in the interview, she might not have secured the post. As it was, Miss Mason decided to try her, and arranged that she was to come to Southampton at the half-term, which would be in about a week from then.

'Of course all depends on Professor Rodney's reference,' she said; 'but as I am certain in advance that that will be favourable, you may really consider the matter settled.'

After her interview with Miss Mason, Martha took a walk by the sea and then had lunch at a small restaurant; and presently found herself once again going back to Upton.

'At last I have committed myself,' she thought. 'There is no going back now. I will show Uncle Tom that I can be quite independent of him. Learn the sampler, indeed! Learn how to bake and brew, and clean a room! Nothing of that sort, Uncle Tom. You said something too much to Martha when you spoke as you did; and now she is going to do without you. It is the sort of lesson you want. Yes it is.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A HEADSTRONG GIRL.

MARTHA returned home in excellent spirits. She found her mother waiting to receive her. Mrs Moore had spent a lonely and somewhat anxious day; but as the time approached when Martha was to come back from that mysterious errand, about which she had as yet offered no explanation, the widow determined to have an old-fashioned and plentiful high-tea ready for her. As there was no chance of Jenkins's return, this meal was spread in Martha's own pretty sitting-room. Annie was commissioned to wait on the two; and when Martha came in and saw her mother dressed in her quietest, and looking her sweetest and nicest, and noticed that Annie, whose usual position in the establishment was that of under-housemaid, was flying in and out like an excited butterfly, she smiled, kissed her mother, and said, 'Oh if we might always live like this, how happy we should be!'

The tea was abundant, and reminded Martha of that wonderful meal which Uncle Tom had provided several months ago now at the cottage; but she was hungry, and not inclined to cavil. She must accept her Uncle

Thomas's bounty for the next few days; then she would be independent. It was delightful to feel this.

'And when I have got over my first soreness,' she said to herself, 'I shall learn—yes, I shall learn and learn, and make myself really very accomplished; and then, perhaps, I may be able to start a school of my own some day, with mother to live with me, for it isn't to be expected that she will always endure Uncle Tom, although no doubt she will get on with him for a short time longer.'

The tea-things were removed, and the two ladies sat in the bay-window. The long day was beginning to fade; but Annie was told on no account to bring lights. Martha crept up close to her mother, took her hand, and stroked it fondly.

'Well, Patty?' said Mrs Moore. Her heart beat a trifle fast; she guessed that she was about to have a tussle with her child.

'You must be prepared, mother. I have gone and done it,' said Martha.

'Gone and done what, my child? You do make me so nervous.'

'I am very, very sorry. I may be right, or I may be wrong; but it seems to me that I have done the right thing. I cannot eat the bread of dependence any longer, mother dear.'

'Nonsense, Martha. Bread of dependence! Your own uncle.'

'But he is not my own uncle. If he were, matters might be different. He is in reality scarcely related to me at all. He evidently takes altogether after that mother whom he worships.'

'A most excellent woman,' said Mrs Moore. 'I do

not like to hear you say a word against her in Thomas's own house.'

'Oh, mummy, you must forgive me; but I almost hate Mrs Jenkins. Why should any woman who has so long been dead come back to torture us as she has done?'

'Well, dearest, need we discuss her now?'

'No, we need not,' said Martha. 'What I have to say is this: I went to Southampton to-day; I saw the headmistress of a very good school for girls there. Her name is Miss Mason. The school is called Milton House, and it faces the sea and stands on fairly high ground. It is a large, commodious, airy house, and there are seventy girls and several resident teachers; and one of those resident teachers is to be your daughter, mummy—your girl, Martha—Patty, as you call her.'

'Nonsense, Martha! Nonsense, Patty. Impossible!'

'It is possible, my own dearest mother, for I cannot live this wretched, wretched life. I am going there, and I shall receive twenty pounds a year; and I will come to see you, if you like, in the vacations—that is, if Uncle Tom will have me. It won't be worse for you than if I had gone to that horrid boarding-school—which he cannot find, fortunately; and I shall be independent, and I shan't rub him the wrong way every moment. Oh, you must let me go—you must.'

'I could prevent you, Martha,' said Mrs Moore, 'for you are not of age. I could write and tell Miss Mason that you are under my authority.'

'But you won't?' said the girl; 'you won't?'

'I must think it over. You puzzle me terribly. I

have seen for a long time that something must be done. I have perceived for a long time that things cannot go on as they have been doing, that you and your poor uncle will never really be friends; but to send you away like this, to toil hard, to have a pittance for a salary'——

'Mother, darling, your ideas of money have altogether altered. You would not have called twenty pounds a year, and all my expenses found, a pittance a few months ago.'

'I know that,' replied Mrs Moore; 'but this annoys me terribly.'

'Let me try it, mother; let me try it for at least six months.'

'That is it. I should not mind if it were just a trial; but he won't receive you back at the end of that time.'

'I will never come back to him in my present position. I will never accept bounty from his hands again.'

'You are very proud, and you are doing very wrong,' said the mother, and she got up, and walking to the door, opened it and went out of the room.

Martha sat for a long time perfectly quiet. There were tears in her eyes, and there was a heavy weight at her heart; but she was absolutely determined to cling to her resolve.

The next day was Wednesday. Martha spent a good deal of her time in sorting out her clothes; she would take not one dress more than she was absolutely obliged to, of those pretty, neat, graceful garments which Uncle Tom's money had provided. She ordered Annie to bring her a certain old brown trunk which

had done duty in her father's time, and in this she placed her oldest frocks and several semi-worn garments. In the end she was obliged to succumb to her necessities, and use some of the very plainest of Uncle Tom's things; but she took care to take as few as possible.

Mrs Moore said no further word to oppose her. Mrs Moore's face was very white, and her eyes looked as if she had secretly indulged in many bouts of crying.

Martha's time flew fast, and on the evening of Wednesday she went to see the Rodneys. Clarissa was at home. Martha went straight to her, and said abruptly, 'Do you happen to know if your father has had a letter about me?'

'He has,' replied Clarissa, 'a most astounding letter from a Miss Mason with regard to your character and acquirements. She says you have offered yourself as one of her pupil-teachers. Miss Mason is a schoolmistress.'

'Wonderful as it sounds, it is true,' replied Martha. 'I am going to Miss Mason in a week's time, immediately after the half-term. I gave notice this morning at the Drummond Day-school; they did look somewhat astonished, of course. My fees have been paid up to the end of the term, but they must be forfeited. I have done the right thing, Clare, and you cannot dissuade me.'

'I cannot make out what is going to happen,' said Clarissa. 'Every one seems more or less in a strained state. As for Janet, she does nothing but mutter in her sleep, and she is always talking about that curious Mr George Sarson. Except when she is petting that ridiculous little puppy which she

rescued from drowning a week ago, she hardly ever smiles, and is full of some secret care. At the same time, she says that she is in excellent spirits. I cannot make out what is wrong. And now you want to go away. Why do you want to do it?'

'It is partly on account of you,' said Martha suddenly. 'You have brought matters to a crisis.'

'I? What do you mean?'

'You have. I meant to bear with him—I really did; but after you sent back that dress he got into such a terrible rage—I never saw anything like it. After wearing it, why did you send it back, Clare? I must say it was most inconsistent of you.'

'Do you think I did it on purpose?' replied Clarissa. 'Mother made me; mother was very, very angry. And I ought not to have worn your dress, Martha; only I was just mad for a bit of frolic, and mother, poor darling, couldn't understand. I am bitterly sorry that I have got you into this trouble.'

'And that is not all,' continued Martha. 'He was furious about the dress, he had been so pleased at you wearing it. I never saw anything like his delight when the party was over; and he kept on saying how nice you looked, and that it was all owing to him, and how delighted he was that you had worn the dress. Of course he was cranky with me; but he was in such a good humour about you I did not much mind that. I went off to school the next morning bright and happy, never expecting for a single instant that you would positively refuse the dress. Well, I came back in the middle of the day, and you never saw such a scene as awaited me. He went out when his temper was just at the worst, and

he saw that pearl ring he gave you in Richardson's shop window.'

'Oh dear! oh dear!' said Clarissa. 'I guessed that must be it. Well, what happened?'

'He went in and he bought it—I don't know how much he paid for it—and he brought it back again; and he went into my room and he rummaged round and round to try and find the duplicate pearl ring which he had given me. He made a sad mess of everything, and broke one of my little favourite ornaments; and of course he could not find the ring, for I had it on my finger. When I returned, there he was in my sitting-room—the room he promised he would never enter—scowling at darling mother, and in such a temper! He asked me for my ring, and compared it with the one he had in his pocket; and oh! I never knew anything like it. He has gone away for a few days; but I expect when he returns he will come and scold you, and ask you why you sold his present.'

'What is to be done?' said Clarissa. 'He is almost certain to do so. He is a very strange man, and evidently can be easily hurt. He is very sensitive; but he has the kindest of hearts.'

'I wish you would not talk about his kind heart; I am sure I am sick of it.'

'But he has,' said Clarissa; 'and that is what makes it all so painful. He won't understand that I am not such an unladylike, vulgar girl as to be angry about his present. I had to sell that ring; I know he is a true gentleman at bottom, and nothing would have induced me to part with it but just because of my own great need. Oh, Martha! you think yourself

in trouble, and you are going to throw up everything —all your comforts and happiness—just for a chimera, no more, and you are going to make your mother a very miserable woman when God meant her to be happy; but you are not in the scrape I am in. If he comes back, and happens to speak about that ring before father and mother, what is to be done?'

'I declare I don't know,' replied Martha; 'I wish I did. I have not been thinking as much of you as I ought, Clare. I have been so disgusted about things myself—so miserable, so upset. I will try to prevent him coming to see you; but the fact is, I have not the slightest control over him. He is returning this evening or to-morrow morning.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A COUNTRY-COUSIN.

THAT evening Thomas Jenkins returned. Mrs Moore and Martha were both wandering about in the garden. There was twilight over everything, but a silver moon was riding in the sky. The sound of wheels was heard crunching on the gravel, and Mrs Moore said hastily, 'Your uncle has come, Patty; we must go and receive him, dear.'

Martha followed, somewhat unwillingly. Now that she had made up her mind to go, she determined, however, to leave no stone unturned to make things as happy for her mother as she could.

A hired fly was drawn up at the door; there was a large rough-looking box of old-fashioned build on the roof. Thomas Jenkins was seen in the act of helping a portly, stoutly-built woman to alight.

'Now then, Hannah, here we are,' he was heard to say. 'Pretty place—eh? Quite my style, and I dare say it is yours too. Ah! here's my sister. Come, Hannah, she is sure to know all about you.'

As Jenkins spoke he took the hand of the stout, rather red-faced lady, and walked with her down the

path up which Mrs Moore and Martha were slowly coming.

'Hullo! how are you?' he said when he saw his sister. 'I have brought my cousin twice removed, Hannah Price, back with me. I have been at the old place, and have been looking up relations; and Hannah was delighted to see your humble servant, so I thought I would bring her to spend a few days at Jenkins Manor.—Let me introduce my sister to you, Hannah—my dear little sister.'

Miss Price came forward and held out her hand to Mrs Moore. Mrs Moore took it, wrung it warmly, and said, 'Any relation of Tom's is sure to be welcome to me. Won't you come indoors? And may I introduce my daughter to you?—Martha, dear, this is your uncle's cousin, Miss Price.'

'The young person I have been telling you about,' said Jenkins, nodding to Miss Price.—'How do, Martha? You 'll hear more of my cousin, Miss Price, by-and-by. —Polly, Hannah is hungry, and would like a good substantial meal. She fights shy of late dinners; but I told her she must put up with them, as we do things in style at Jenkins Manor, and she 's satisfied to bear with them for a few days; but she says any real change in her way of life would make her ill.'

'I suffer awful from the indigestion,' was Miss Price's first remark; 'but, as I said to Thomas, for a day or two it don't matter.'

'Well, come into the house now,' said Mrs Moore. She entered, followed by the stout lady.

Meanwhile, Jenkins was giving royal and imperious orders.

'See that the yellow bedroom is got ready immedi-

ately for my cousin, Miss Price,' he said to the startled footman, who came to help in with the luggage. 'Have her box taken to her room; see that everything possible is done for her comfort. Put off dinner for half-an-hour. What are you loitering for? Stop staring, and go and do what you are told.'

Meanwhile Martha, wondering what all this portended, entered the house.

Miss Price was conducted to her room, Mrs Moore herself leading the way. The yellow bedroom happened to be one of the most gaudy in the whole house. Certain bedrooms were, by Jenkins's orders, always kept in readiness; as, although up to the present he had never invited a guest to stay at Jenkins Manor, he wished to feel that he could do so at any instant.

'I hope you will find the room comfortable,' said Mrs Moore.

'It's very spacious and chilly,' was Miss Price's remark; 'and I suffer from the indigestion. What hour do you have your next meal?'

'In half-an-hour from now. Can I do anything more for you?'

'No, thank you.'

Mrs Moore left the room. She went downstairs, where she saw her brother.

'Eh! Polly, what do you think of her?' he asked.

'Think of her, dear Tom? I have scarcely seen her.'

'Well, there is a good bit of her to see—isn't there?'

'She came when it was nearly dark.'

'Well, she has come to stay for a day or two; she is the person that Martha is to live with in the future.'

'Nonsense, Tom.'

'It's useless for you to say "Nonsense,"' replied Thomas Jenkins, 'when my mind is made up. Hannah Price knows her sampler, she knows her bakery, she knows her dairy, she knows how to keep a place spick and span; and Hannah has the greatest reverence for the memory of my dear mother. When I went back to my native place, Hannah was the first to bring me little mementos of her. I am very much attached to Hannah; she is an excellent woman, and Martha is to go back with her. I have settled it all.'

Poor Mrs Moore's heart beat uncomfortably fast. Between Martha, Hannah Price, and her brother she was likely to have a very unpleasant time for the next few days.

The great gong sounded, but Miss Price did not make her appearance.

'You had better go up, Martha, and bring her down,' said Mrs Moore. 'Anything, darling, to keep the peace for my sake. Dearest, do try to make the best of things.'

Martha, who was neatly dressed for dinner in a pretty soft white dress, ran upstairs and knocked at Miss Price's door. That lady opened it and flung it wide.

'Are you the girl,' she said, 'whom I am to take back with me?'

'Certainly not,' replied Martha.

'Well, I hope to goodness no. I don't like your looks; but my cousin, Mr Jenkins, said something about an obstreperous niece that I was to break in.'

'Dinner is ready. Will you come down?' said Martha.

'I hate late meals; but I suppose I will come. And where am I to find the room you eat in? I can't discover my way in this great barrack of a place.'

'Oh, it is a barrack?' said Martha, suddenly delighted. 'You don't like it—do you?'

'Like it, child? I hate it.'

'Better and better,' said Martha. 'Take my hand and I'll lead you down.' For some extraordinary reason, she suddenly found Miss Hannah Price much more agreeable and more to her taste than Thomas Jenkins.

As they crossed the hall, the floor of which was inlaid with parquetry, Miss Price slipped, and had it not been for Martha would have fallen.

'Good gracious me! What an awful sort of place,' she said. 'Is the floor ice?'

'I quite agree with you that it is awful,' replied Martha.

'I won't stay here long; I'll tell Tom so. I never wanted to stay—never. He said I must see you for myself—you, or whoever it is I am to take back with me.'

'I am the girl,' said Martha suddenly. 'You don't want me—do you?' She stood under the lamplight and allowed Miss Price to stare at her.

'You 're not a bit my style,' she said.

'I thought not. That 's right; stick to it. Won't you say you don't want me?—and I'll do everything in my power to make things pleasant for you while you are here.'

'You seem to have a grain of sense, all the same, lass, and you might suit me,' said Miss Price with a grim smile.

She and Martha entered the dining-room side by side.

'Hullo! Hannah, here's your place next me,' said Jenkins; 'here you are.'

Miss Price, opening her round eyes wide, dropped into the chair indicated. Jenkins motioned to the butler to remove the covers.

'Goodness! what's that?' said Miss Price.

'Soup, Hannah; soup—very nourishing and easily digested.'

'I'll thank you,' said Miss Price, looking full at the astonished butler, 'to go down to your kitchen and order a slightly-boiled egg for me, with some thick slices of bread-and-butter and a cup of tea.—Thank you, Thomas—much obliged; but I couldn't possibly partake of any other form of refreshment. I'll thank you, my good man,' she continued, resuming her speech to the amazed servant, 'to tell the cook not to boil the egg more than three minutes; I don't wish it more than *just* set. Let that be plainly understood.'

As this order was given in a majestic, deep voice, and as there evidently was not the slightest sign of wavering about Miss Hannah Price's face, the butler was forced to retire to hide his smothered mirth.

Until the egg, thick bread-and-butter, and tea appeared, Miss Price sat with her hands folded solemnly in front of her.

'You would find this soup good if you would only try it,' said Jenkins.

'Thank you, Tom; but I prefer not,' was her answer. She did not seem at all confused or in the least elated at the manners of her over-ambitious and excited host.

Thomas Jenkins tried to tempt her again when the fish came on the table; but she shook her head resolutely.

'Very nice, I have no doubt, Tom; but I'd rather not.'

At last the meal which she herself had ordered appeared, and she began to eat, munching straight through the thick bread-and-butter, draining her cup of tea, and finishing her egg. When she had done this she sat back in her chair. As course, however, after course appeared, Miss Hannah Price grew restless.

'Is it fine manners to stay a long time at dinner when you yourself have finished?' was her query.

'No, no, Hannah; this is Liberty Hall. You can please yourself,' was his answer.

Whereupon Miss Hannah Price did please herself by rising and making towards the door; but the next instant a shriek greeted the ears of all those present. She had put her two stout feet upon a mat, which suddenly began to glide away with her over the parquetry.

'For Heaven's sake, Thomas, come out,' she shouted; and her kinsman had immediately to go to her relief.

'Oh, mother,' said Martha in a choking voice, 'she is too comical; but I like her.'

'Thomas, I don't admire your house,' was his cousin's remark.

And Thomas Jenkins returned to finish his dinner with a somewhat rueful expression on his face.

The meal proceeded to its solemn close. Neither Mrs Moore nor Martha spoke much. Jenkins only muttered monosyllables in a gruff tone below his breath. At last, dessert being on the table, and the

servants withdrawn, perfect silence ensued. Martha wondered how soon she might get away; but before she had time to rise her uncle's voice calling her name startled her into attention. 'Come here, Martha Moore,' he said.

Martha rose.

'Sit down there,' said Jenkins; 'there, in my cousin Hannah Price's chair.'

Martha did drop into the chair indicated.

'There is no one but your mother to listen,' continued Jenkins, 'so I can speak out freely. I am willing to own up to my own faults. I was very angry when I went away. I was in a temper—such a temper as I didn't know I possessed. You had awoke it in me—you and the other wench, Clarissa Rodney. I was raging; I scarcely knew myself. I struggled against it, for I had promised a little bit of a girl, who is not the least like either you or Clarissa Rodney, that I would do nothing violent for a week; but I could not hold myself in. The week is out to-morrow, and then I am released of my bond. But I wish to say now that I am not in a temper at the present moment.'

'No, uncle, I am sure of that,' said Martha.

'Well, take my hand, lass. I don't mean any ill-will. I am willing to let bygones be bygones.'

'Thank you, Uncle Tom; but'——

'Now, hold your peace, Martha, and hear me. I don't pretend to deny that you have been a trial to me from the moment I clapped my two eyes on you. I had looked forward much to lavishing my money on you—to making up to you for the days of penury; but there, I am not the first man who

has dreamed dreams which have never come true—I am not the first, and I am not the last, by a good many. You disappointed me, and I was angry. I don't suppose I had any right to be angry, for you couldn't help the way you were born; but now what has been can't be any longer, and I have arranged with my kinswoman, Hannah Price, to bring about a change. My kinswoman is all that is excellent; she is the very essence of common-sense, she is kindness itself, she is goodness itself. She has no fine-lady airs; she is a woman in the best sense of the word. If you were ill she would nurse you to the death; if you were sorry she would cheer you; if you were glad she would be merry with you. Hannah's character is well known all over Dartford, where I used to live in my childish days. Hannah is the most looked-up-to woman in the district, and I am proud to be cousin to her, although it is twice removed; and I am proud, very proud, to think she will take you, my lass, in hand.'

'But, Uncle Tom—but, Uncle Tom'——

'Come, child, no more words. You come with me. You go to-morrow; yes, to-morrow. Come with me now.'

'But, Uncle Tom'——

'Come with me. Hold your tongue, Martha. You and Hannah Price have got to talk to one another. Come this minute.'

'Yes, Martha; go, dear, go,' said Mrs Moore.

Martha looked at her mother; she dragged her hand away from that of Thomas Jenkins, and stood quiet for a moment. She looked something like a young stag at bay; her eyes were full of entreaty.

'Never mind,' she said, 'I'll have my say afterwards. You can talk out all that is in your heart; I'll have my say afterwards.'

'Bless the girl! What a spirit she has!' said Jenkins. 'I promised Hannah Price that I wouldn't be angry. Now then, come.'

Martha and her uncle crossed the hall together. Just as they were leaving the room he turned and nodded to his sister.

'You stay where you are, Polly; you are not to interfere. I have a very nice little plan for us two afterwards—a very jolly little plan; but first of all we must arrange for Martha. The young always do come first in the present day. Ha! ha!'

The uncle and niece crossed the slippery parquetry hall. In the middle Thomas Jenkins suddenly gave voice to his powerful lungs.

'I say, Hannah Price, where are you hiding?'

'I'm in the drawing-room, Thomas,' was the reply; and Thomas Jenkins and his niece went in the direction of that gorgeous—and, in Martha's opinion, terrible—apartment.

The drawing-room at night was brilliantly lit with quantities of incandescent burners. The girl blinked her eyes as if in pain when she entered. There were two chandeliers from the ceiling, and there were several gas-brackets against the walls. Wherever light could be put, it was, for Jenkins's idea of perfect beauty was an unlimited glare. What with the mirrors and what with the royal-blue decorations, and what with the gilt, the room now was the reverse of peaceful.

Hannah Price was seated on an ottoman exactly under one of the large gasaliers. She was not leaning

back—she was bolt upright. Her large feet were spread well in front of her, and she was knitting a woollen stocking. She did not raise her eyes when her cousin and his niece came in, but went on knitting a little faster than usual. A ball of wool lay on the floor at her feet. She kicked it a little away as Thomas Jenkins said, 'Well, Hannah, here we are.'

'First of all, Thomas,' said Hannah, not resigning her needles, but raising her steely gray eyes to his face, 'let me congratulate you on this room. It is the first sensible room I have seen in the house. I like it extremely; it is handsome and full of light, and I like the furniture. You must have spent a lot on the room, Thomas; there is money all over it—wasteful money I call it; but still it is beyond doubt a handsome apartment.'

'Do you think so?' said Thomas in a most cheerful tone. 'Ha! ha! I guessed you and I had some things in common. Now, this is exactly the room my mother, were she alive, would have furnished. I seem to see my mother all over it.'

'Your mother, Thomas Jenkins,' said Hannah Price in a solemn tone, 'had the most admirable taste I ever saw in any woman.'

'Right you are, Hannah—right you are; and the more you talk in that strain the better you please me. Well now, then, here 's the lass, and we had better settle things as fast as possible.'

Poor Martha, feeling exactly as if she were dragged to her execution, was accommodated by Jenkins with a chair, which he placed full in front of Hannah Price, and still more, if possible, under the glare from the gasalier.

Thomas himself stood with his legs slightly apart, his hands in his trousers pockets, at right angles to the two ladies.

'Now then, Hannah,' he said, 'I have explained the scheme to you; you explain it to Martha.'

Thus adjured, Hannah Price deliberately folded up her long stocking. She bent forward and picked up the worsted ball; she deposited stocking and ball in a hideous cretonne bag which hung on her arm. She then looked full up at Martha.

'My lass,' she said, 'you don't like me, and I'm not at all certain that I like you.'

'Nonsense,' said Jenkins; 'that's not the way to begin. It's not a question of liking—it's downright business; it's the saving of a lass from destruction. It's her last chance, I tell you, Hannah; it's her last chance of turning into a woman like my mother.'

'But I never intend to be a woman like your mother,' began Martha.

'Hush!' said Hannah. Hannah's tone was so firm, and her 'hush' so profound, that Martha in spite of herself was reduced to silence. 'It is this,' said Hannah; 'your uncle'——

'He is not my uncle,' said Martha.

'Well, your step-uncle wishes me to look after you, to fend for you, and make for you, and bake for you, and brew for you for a year.—Yes, Thomas, we won't make it longer than a year.—Hold your tongue, miss; you have got to hear me out. You are to come away with me to-morrow, or the next day at farthest, and I will give you a good time. I will teach you the sort of things you know nothing about. I will teach you this, for instance'—here she touched

the bag which contained her knitting; 'I'll teach you the mysteries of cooking; I'll teach you how to preserve, and how to boil hams, and how to wash, and how to iron, and how to mangle; I'll show you the right way to milk a cow; and I'll show you the right way to feed the chickens. You will turn into a hearty lass, and all that is sensible in you will come to the fore. You won't live in this sort of house, which, with the exception of this one room, is a house to be dreaded; you won't slide about on ice-floors; you won't have to sleep in yellow bedrooms. —That bedroom of yours, Tom, is an abomination, and I say so frankly.'

Thomas Jenkins moved a foot or two away from his cousin, Hannah Price.

'And you'll come home with me to-morrow, and we'll try it for a year.—That's a bargain—isn't it, Thomas? I don't say that I take to the wench at present, although, if I am not greatly mistaken, she has a grain of sense somewhere in her composition, and you have a bit of the fool in yours. I'll know about these matters when I have had the girl with me for a year.—Now then, Martha, is it a bargain?'

But before Martha could utter a word there came an interruption.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE KITTEN TO THE RESCUE.

THE interruption was of that nature that it could not possibly be got rid of or ignored or pushed aside. It came in the form of a small girl, whose cheeks were rosy and eyes bright. The girl had curling hair, and was altogether as pretty looking a little object as the heart of man could desire; she was dressed all in white, and she tripped forward with the graceful half-dancing step of a happy child. She came straight up to Jenkins.

'You have not forgotten to-morrow?' said Janet.

'Well, to be sure,' said Jenkins, 'here's the little miss that I rescued. And how is the puppy, my dear? and how are you?'

'I am very well indeed, I thank you,' replied Janet; 'And how are you, Mr Thomas Jenkins?'

'I am quite well too, missy.'

'I have come,' said Janet, 'to remind you of your promise.—Oh, how do you do, Martha?' She went up to Martha and shook hands with her.

'What promise?' said Jenkins, rubbing his eyes. He felt bewildered and excited; he was just making the most comfortable arrangements by which he could

get rid of Martha, his *bête noire*, and was not too well pleased to be interrupted by a silly little girl like Janet Rodney.

'You promised,' said Janet, 'you would do nothing for a week, in order to give me time to explain. I want to explain about my darling Clare and the pearl ring, and to show you that there's no one in all the world like Clare—no one else so noble, no one else so brave. I can do it all to-morrow. Everything is ready, and you are to come, please, Mr Thomas Jenkins; and you are not to make any plans until after to-morrow, 'cos you promised me. Will you please come to father's house to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and will you bring Martha with you? You can bring Mrs Moore if she will come, for it doesn't matter how many are there, as I want all the world to know about my Clare.'

'And may I come too, little lady?' said Hannah Price, rising at that moment.

'Please, who are you?' asked Janet.

'She is my kinswoman, little Miss Rodney, and a very fine woman too, with plenty of character.'

'I think you look rather nice,' said Janet; 'and as this is my party I shall be very glad to see you.'

'Oh, a party is it?' said Hannah Price; 'but I suffer from the indigestion. I hope you won't expect me to eat.'

'I don't know that there will be anything to eat; it is not exactly that kind of party; but it's much more important than any other that ever was heard of. Please come if you like, 'cos I may invite any one I please. Come all of you to father's house at twelve o'clock to-morrow.'

Jenkins's face, which had grown first red and then rather pale, now relaxed with an effort. He went up to Janet and took her hand.

'Are you telling me the truth,' he said, 'or are you making a fool of me?'

'I always speak the truth,' replied Janet a little proudly. 'I said I'd do it, and I have done it; and everything in all the world will be made right to-morrow, and you will know about my Clare.'

'About her selling the ring I gave her?'

'Yes. You'll know everything; you'll know that she could not—— But I must not explain beforehand; but you may rest quite satisfied. Are you coming?—that's all.'

'Yes, of course I'll come, little missy. I'll bring Martha, if she likes, and my cousin, and my sister, if you so wish it; and if you can do anything to make me feel that your sister Clarissa has not fooled me, and that she is as fine a lass as I always thought her, why, there's nothing I won't do for you too, little missy.'

'Well, you'll have to do a fine lot for me, then,' said Janet. 'I want lots of things.'

'You can ask me for anything you please,' said Jenkins.

'I am very happy,' replied Janet. 'I ran away without leave, and perhaps mother will be angry, so I had best go now.'

'I'll walk back with you, missy.'

'No, thank you; one of our maids came with me, and she is waiting outside. Good-bye, Mr Jenkins. Please come at twelve o'clock to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JANET'S PARTY.

'I CANNOT understand George Sarson,' Professor Rodney said to his wife.

'Why, what is the matter with him?' she asked.

'He is so strange. I have just had a telegram from him to say he will be here at a quarter to twelve. He came down, if you remember, early in the week; and, as far as I could tell, had not a blessed thing to say to me.'

'I do remember,' said Mrs Rodney. 'I was much puzzled myself. He seemed very confidential with Janet.'

'Yes,' said the Professor, laughing, 'he has taken quite a fancy to Little Miss Nonentity, as he calls our pretty little Janet. I, of course, thought that he had come here on important business to see me, and asked him into my study; but I assure you, my dear, he had not a thing to talk about. He was quite absent-minded; and, except for the somewhat tiresome remarks, "I hope, Rodney, you are faithful to the cod-liver oil," "I trust, Rodney, you do your inhaling properly every morning," he did nothing whatever but pace up and down the room, repeating

at intervals, "Strange! very, very strange!" Suddenly he stopped, looked at his watch, and told me he must be off. I said, "But you have not explained the nature of your visit." "Oh, that will keep," he said. "Good-bye, Rodney," and then he did dash off. Yes, of course I always knew he was a peculiar sort of man, and I resolved to forget his eccentricities on that occasion; but now here is a wire from him:

'"Expect me at Upton on the same business that brought me on Wednesday last. Will be with you at a quarter to twelve."

'Now, as far as I can tell, he came with no business whatever on Wednesday except to question me with regard to the cod-liver oil—a nauseous mess I never touch—and on the subject of my breathing.'

'He is a little cracked, in my opinion,' said Mrs Rodney. 'Don't fret about him, dear. I am sorry he is coming, for he is always so rude to us ladies; still, as he is really devoted to you, I'll do the best I can for him.'

On this occasion Janet was also in intense excitement. She had absolutely begged for a holiday from school.

'My dear Janet, that I never do give,' said her mother.

'Then, mother,' said Janet, turning very red, 'I am going to disobey you.'

'Disobey me? What do you mean?'

'Please, mother'—— Janet went up to her mother and coaxed her. 'Please, trust me until after twelve o'clock to-day; it is so important, and I will work double hard to-morrow. Please—please, trust me, mummy.'

And strange to say, and very much also to Janet's own surprise, Mrs Rodney did assent to her request.

'I will trust you,' she said, 'if you will promise to explain things to me afterwards.'

So Janet had her own way, and was happy and excited as child could be.

As to Clarissa, it was possible for her to leave the day-school and to be back at the Rodneys' house just about noon. Janet said very little to Clarissa about what was to take place; the only remark she made to her as she was going out very sadly—for she was feeling much depressed—was, 'You are going to dine at home to-day, Clare?'

'I generally do, Janey. Why do you ask?'

'Only, you 'll be sure to be punctual. You get here at twelve o'clock?'

'At twelve, or a few minutes past.'

'Well, that's all right. I'd like you to come in about a quarter-past twelve. It is very, very urgent.'

'What a child you are for secrets, Janey!' Clarissa kissed her sister in a partly abstracted manner and then left the house.

At a quarter to twelve punctually the little Professor arrived. Janet was standing on the steps waiting to greet him.

'There you are!' she said. She rushed down and caught both his hands.

'Eh, kitten!' was his reply. 'Here I am.'

He and she went into the house together.

'Have you done it?' said Janet.

'Yes.'

'The people are coming,' said Janet after a pause.

'The people! Good Heavens! what people?'

'The people who must know Clare as she is.'

'Is the young fellow to be present?' asked the Professor after a pause.

'Clare is to be present afterwards. You 'll have time to make your speech first.'

'Then that is all right. And you don't object to my wearing my blue glasses, and standing in such a position that I shall only see your father?'

'There will be another man there, and a very important man: Mr Thomas Jenkins.'

'Oh, I don't mind a man. Keep the women in the background, as you love me, Nonentity.'

'I 'll do my best,' said Janet.

She herself had arranged the dining-room, where the all-important interview was to take place. She had taken one of the servants into her confidence, and had drawn down all the blinds in the direction where she meant to place her female guests, and had drawn up the blinds just in that part of the room where her father and Thomas Jenkins were to place themselves.

'He won't see the ladies at all,' thought Janet; 'and perhaps he will drop his blue spectacles and allow his kind, dear blue eyes to show themselves. It don't matter how shabby he is when you look at his blue eyes; but I do wish he hadn't that shiny old coat with the hole in the back. The button was nearly gone when he was here on Wednesday, and now it has quite gone; there is a big hole where the button ought to be.'

But as Janet could not have everything her own way, even on this auspicious occasion, she was forced to put up with the hole in Professor Sarson's coat.

She took him into the garden and had a little further conversation, and presently she asked him to step into her father's study, and then she herself went and stood on the steps, devoutly trusting that her mother would not see her.

By-and-by she observed, coming slowly down the street, a sight which caused her heart to beat a trifle quicker than usual and a curious mixture of pleasure and awe to fill her little childish breast. First of all in the procession might be seen Thomas Jenkins arrayed in his loudest and his best. He had taken great pains with his toilet. His valet had been well called into requisition; Jenkins was now sufficiently accustomed to this individual to exercise his own determined will, and the valet had to dress him once more as if he were going to a bridal. How his wonderful diamond studs sparkled! How that magnificent ring on his fourth finger gleamed! How his shirt-front shone with immaculate whiteness! And what a perfect fit was his frock-coat!

Leaning on her brother's arm came Mrs Moore, neatly and quietly dressed, and looking the perfect lady that she was. Jenkins, in his heart, disapproved of his sister's attire.

'You might do things a little more stylishly,' he said.

But Mrs Moore shook her head. 'I was always one for quiet colours,' she said; 'you know that, Thomas.'

'But not when you dreamt of the dress the colour of a rose,' he answered. 'By the way, I seldom or never see you in that dress.'

Now Mrs Moore had had the silk made into a very gorgeous tea-gown, which she sometimes did wear when

she found herself quite alone with her brother. She smiled now, but made no answer.

In the wake of the first couple came the second couple, these consisting of Hannah Price and Martha. Martha was in her quietest—and, indeed, her shabbiest—costume; but she looked neat and nice. Miss Price wore the dress she wore on all occasions. It was short, coming little below her ankles; it was made of a serviceable brown serge—a somewhat hot dress for the time of year. Over the serge dress she wore a sack-coat very full and much too large for her. The coat had innumerable pockets, and in one of them was the cretonne bag which contained her knitting. On her head she wore a mushroom hat trimmed with a solitary band of brown ribbon, and cotton gloves covered her large red hands; her face beamed with good humour and interest. She occasionally leaned on Martha as she walked and talked the whole time in an animated way to the young girl.

'They are coming,' said Janet; 'it is all as right as possible.' She turned to a servant who stood near. 'Jessie,' she said, 'the very instant my sister Clare comes, tell her that I want her in the dining-room. Be sure you tell her the minute she comes in.'

'Yes, Miss Janet; but how excited you are, to be sure, miss.'

'I have reason to be, Jessie. I am about the happiest girl in the world.'

All the servants loved Janet, and Jessie now smiled with pleasure at the little girl's delight.

'Here you are,' said Janet, as the four approached and began to walk up the steps. 'How do you do, Mr Jenkins? How do you do, Mrs Moore? Please, all

of you come in, and don't make much noise in the hall. It's a little unexpected; but then it's my party.'

She ushered them into the dining-room.

'Please, Mrs Moore,' she said, 'do you mind sitting in the dark part of the room, and you too, Miss Price, and you too, Martha? He can't bear women; that's the reason.'

'Then why, in the name of fortune, have we come here?' was Hannah Price's strident remark.

'Oh, do hush, please. It's my party; don't spoil everything.—Mr Jenkins, he quite likes men; you can stand here with the sunlight on you. Oh, what a beautiful coat you have on, and what a lovely diamond!'

'Ah!' said Jenkins. 'I look fine—do I? Glad you think so, little miss. Is Miss Clarissa about to put in an appearance?'

'She will presently, Mr Jenkins—presently, when she is wanted.—Now, please, all of you stay very still. Don't, on any account, change your places.—Mr Jenkins, do stand where the sun will shine on you, you look so nice; and, please, all the rest of you do keep in the dark. Now, that is all right.'

The guests looked at one another in some amazement. Miss Hannah Price thought it expedient to sniff and to say these were not country manners, and that for her part she was put out of all patience by seeing men so uplifted. 'Thomas thinks enough of himself as it is,' she said; 'and I for one have no mind to humour him. That's a silly child; I don't think much of her.'

But the silly child was having it all her own way at that moment. She marched into the study where Mr Sarson, looking extremely nervous and fearfully

distrait, not having uttered a word to the Professor except on the subject of cod-liver oil and inhalations, was waiting for her.

'Ha! little creature,' he said, 'time's flying. Are you ready?'

'Quite ready, please, Mr Sarson.—Father, darling, I am giving a party.'

'My dear Janey, what do you mean?'

'I am giving a party, too,' said Mr Sarson. 'Nonentity and I are giving a party. Come, good folks, come. The sooner we tackle it the sooner it will be over. Come, madam, may I have the honour of seeing you join our party? Professor, Nonentity and I will lead the way.'

Accordingly, Mr Sarson strode up to Janet, took her hand, and with almost a dancing measure left the room accompanied by the child.

'This becomes more and more wonderful,' said Mrs Rodney, looking at her husband.

'Well, my dear,' he said after a pause, 'I suppose we must humour them.'

'What are we to humour them about? Where are we to go?'

'Oh, mummy, do come,' called out Janet, looking back; and then they all filed into the dining-room.

'Mummy, please sit in the dark part of the room,' said Janet.

Mrs Rodney, in some displeasure, followed her little girl. Janet had left a vacant place for her near Mrs Moore.

'Keep quite quiet both of you,' she said; 'it's my party and Professor Sarson's. Everything will go right now.'

Having arranged her mother to her satisfaction, Janet next proceeded to place her father well in view. She would have liked to have got him to hold the hand of Thomas Jenkins; but she thought perhaps that might be going one step too far. She noticed, however, with delight that the sun was shining full on Thomas Jenkins, and that his diamonds were flashing in the most delightful way; she also observed how noble her own father looked, how fine was the contour of his upright and yet slightly worn figure, and how splendid the expression in his full dark eyes. He glanced all round the room, then looked at Thomas Jenkins, nodded to him, and said in a low voice, 'This is a mystery to me, sir; but I suppose we must humour the little one;' and then he prepared himself to await events.

Having placed all her guests, Janet now proceeded to turn her attention to Professor Sarson. Never in the whole course of his life had this individual felt more uncomfortable; he said afterwards that he was exactly in the position of a person exposed to the full rays of the sun through burning glasses.

'There were,' he was fond of saying afterwards, 'eight eyes all situated in female faces turned full upon me. I don't reckon Nonentity's eyes in this list. It was the most awful moment of my whole life.'

The Professor himself, however, took care to mitigate his tortures by turning his back full upon the women-folk and addressing his remarks directly to Professor Rodney and Mr Jenkins.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PROFESSOR SARSON'S VIEW OF THE MATTER.

'ARE your trains punctual here, Rodney?' was Professor Sarson's first strange remark—a remark which caused Miss Hannah Price to sniff quite audibly, and say under her breath to Martha:

'I thought that little girl was fooling us. It is a great mistake to encourage children and put them out of their places.'

'Hush, please; do listen,' was Martha's answer.

Professor Sarson came a step forward and took out his watch.

'Are the trains punctual?' he repeated.

'Yes, as a rule,' replied Mr Rodney; and just at that moment, as if to answer him, there was a sound of wheels in the street outside, wheels which came faster and faster and stopped abruptly outside the Rodneys' door. There was an anxious pause on the part of every one, a pause of intense expectation. Even little Janet looked uneasy and perplexed. The Professor alone seemed relieved; he took out his handkerchief and wiped the moisture from his forehead. He removed his blue glasses and cleaned them

carefully, and muttered under his breath, 'This is a relief. Thank Heaven! this is a relief.'

The next instant the door of the big dining-room was flung open, and Jessie announced in clear, penetrating, and vibrant tones, 'Sir John Carbery!'

The effect of the great London doctor's appearance on the scene was magnetic. He had been heard of by every one present. Mr Rodney looked at him, with the colour mounting into his cheeks. Mrs Rodney attempted to step forward; but Janet sprang to her side and held her back.

'No, no, mummy,' she said, 'leave it all, please, please, to Professor Sarson.'

Then Sir John, bowing to his host and hostess, came forward and shook hands with Professor Sarson.

'Am I in time?' he said.

'Quite in time, and I am much obliged to you,' said Professor Sarson. 'Will you stand there, please?' He requested the doctor to stand just in the line of sunlight which little Janet had marked out.

She looked at him with almost her soul in her eyes. How splendid he was! A giant come to deliver!

And now Professor Sarson seemed to lose his shyness, to feel the personality of the great doctor as a perfect tower of strength, and thus to be enabled to speak with the same *sang-froid* he would have done in his lecture-hall at University College.

'I may as well say,' he began at once, 'that the task I have before me gives me pleasure. It is the work altogether, from first to last, of Little Miss Nonentity. I have a great admiration for the little person who bears that title, and for her sake I have put myself in a position which, I will frankly say,

would have been one of terror had not Sir John Carbery come to my support. It seems that there is a great deal of misunderstanding abroad, and in particular does this misunderstanding cluster round the person of a young creature who bears the name of Clarissa Rodney. It is the misfortune of this young person to have been born a female, for she has many of those qualities which would have made her an excellent man—she has brains, determination, and the wit to use what Providence has given her in the hour of emergency. Little Miss Nonentity has been much troubled with regard to Miss Clarissa, and has asked me to try to put things straight. Now, I wish to do so, and I think I can best accomplish that task by allowing my kind friend—for he certainly is my friend—Sir John Carbery to speak for himself.' Here the Professor blew his nose vigorously, took off his glasses, muttered under his breath, 'Hot, very hot! Must go to a high altitude after this, in order to restore the balance;' but as nobody listened to his mutterings he kept them to himself.

And now Sir John Carbery took one step forward. 'I am very pleased to come,' he said. 'Professor Sarson called on me the night before last, and put a problem to me. In some ways it was a difficult problem, as it involved the breaking of my word; but in the many perplexities of life I believe there come moments when more harm is done by holding your peace than by making a plain statement, and I think that time has come now. I will, for the benefit of those present, relate as shortly and in as few words as possible a story.'

How they all looked at the doctor as he spoke!

How clear and melodious were his tones! how humorous and yet firm the expression of his eyes! He was a man whose decree meant life or death to many people; he had stood by deathbeds innumerable; he had bidden the tired traveller on life's journey prepare for his end. On the other hand, he had restored those who were on the brink of death to life, and had caused hearts to rejoice and thousands to love him.

'I will tell my story briefly,' he repeated; and then he began:

'On a certain morning in the late autumn of last year I had seen many patients, and was a little tired when my servant came into my room to say that a lady wanted to see me immediately. It was just past my hour for attending to patients, and I was about to refuse, when the man—who does not often interfere—said, "The lady is young, sir, and seems in trouble."

'Something in the tone touched me, and I said she was to be admitted. A girl came into the room. The date of the visit was the 20th of October of last year.'

'The 20th of October?' here muttered Mrs Rodney.

Janet had squeezed herself close to her mother now, and pressed her little hand quite firmly into hers. 'Yes, mummy, yes,' she said in a low voice; 'the day father was so very, very ill.'

'I can never forget it,' said Mrs Rodney.

'The girl appeared, and I asked her to seat herself,' continued the doctor. 'She was young and slender, only a school-girl. She had a nice face. I cannot recall her features, but I know her eyes were good, dark, and full of feeling. She had self-control also,

and there was nothing of the hysterical miss about her. She told me a brief story. She said that her father was dying—she wished me to visit him; she earnestly desired that I should come to see him at her expense. Her name was Clarissa Rodney.'

'What!' said Professor Rodney.

'One moment, Rodney,' said the doctor; 'you can ask me any questions you like afterwards. I was deeply, deeply interested in her. I got her to tell me all her story; the main point of it, however, is enough for those assembled here. Clarissa Rodney wanted to take those steps which in her opinion, and in the opinion of the local doctor, Dr Bennett, would best give her father—you, sir—a chance of recovery. She said she had recently obtained a scholarship worth forty pounds a year, and would pay my fee as soon as she received the money from the Governors of the school. I would gladly, more than gladly have paid a visit to the father of one so plucky and brave without any fee; but I saw that half her pleasure would go if she did not feel that she herself was the active agent in this matter. So I fell in with her view, which was simply, that I was to give Dr Bennett and you, sir, to understand that a special and very great friend of yours had paid this money. I came to see you, and, under Providence, was enabled to take steps which restored you to the health you are now enjoying.'

'One minute,' said little Janet at that instant; 'one minute, please.' She hastily rose from her seat, ran across the room, opened the door, and was heard to say in a clear and very excited voice, 'Clare! Clare! come in, come in.'

'What is it?' said Clarissa.

Janet ran to her, held out both her hands, and drew her sister into the room. 'Here 's Clarissa,' she said. 'You see her again, Sir John Carbery.—Father, here 's Clarissa.'

'Come here, my child. I have been listening to strange things about you,' said Professor Rodney. He crossed the room slowly, took Clare's hand, put his arm round her waist, and drew her up to that part of the room where Jenkins and Sir John Carbery were standing.

'The rest of the story is now my affair,' said Professor Sarson. 'Oh! it is all right, young fellow —girl, I mean; you have been cleared abundantly. But I know the rest, and so does Nonentity here. —Nonentity, we 'll have everything arranged in fine style for your brave young fellow—girl, I mean— in a few moments. The young fellow—girl, I mean— behaved with extreme pluck; but, alas! the course of this true love—the love of a daughter for her father— was not destined to run smooth. Miss Clarissa found out a day or two afterwards that she could not use the scholarship money in the way she intended; in fact, no money was to be given to her at all. The rules had been altered, and she had not noticed the alteration. The scholarship money was to be expended most worthily, most justly, and in my opinion most wisely, in paying for certain lectures for the benefit of the holder. I repeat, most wisely—for even the female mind can imbibe a certain amount of information: I will never deny that—never. In Miss Clarissa's case, however, the decision of the Governors of the Drummond Day-school was not so fortunate, and she

got into great trouble. She did not know how to pay Sir John Carbery.'

'My dear young friend, an explanatory note would have put everything right,' said Sir John Carbery, bowing to Clarissa at that moment.

'Not at all! Not at all!' interrupted Professor Sarson. 'I understand that the young fellow—girl, I mean—had some pride; naturally and rightly, the daughter of Rodney should have pride. The daughter of Rodney gave her bond, and Nonentity and I quite saw that that bond must be kept. Accordingly, my young friend here—even though she is a girl, I feel quite tolerant towards her—had to put her wits to work; she tried every possible means to get the necessary money, and at last in despair was forced to sell a ring which was given to her, I believe, by a very kind friend of hers, Mr Thomas Jenkins. You, sir, I understand, are the gentleman who presented Miss Clarissa Rodney with a pearl ring. Now, you will excuse me, sir; you can say anything you like afterwards, but for the present allow me to proceed. The ring was naturally of very little moment to the young person to whom it was given compared to that young person's own honour, and her bond to the man who had saved her father. So she, in a moment of extremity, but at the same time somewhat foolishly, sold it to a local jeweller. Had she thought of sending it to me I could have got my man to dispose of it in town; but she was impulsive—that is part of the character of most women. In the present instance we have nothing to say against that, for had she not been impulsive, our friend Professor Rodney would not now be in our midst. I think, for the sake

of that most precious life, we must forgive that young person her impetuosity. She sold your ring, sir, out of no disrespect to you, but because she loved her father so much. She paid Sir John Carbery.'

'That she did, and to the hour,' was Sir John Carbery's comment.

'I understand that, although a small matter, the sale of the ring has given you considerable annoyance, Mr Thomas Jenkins,' continued Professor Sarson. 'Now, you can have your say, for I am anxious to catch the next train to town. Locality flat—not suited to my special idiosyncrasy. There is just one thing more and I have done. Miss Clarissa—the young fellow I have been speaking about—being anxious to save her father, went to town; but she had no money, and was obliged to resort to stratagem. The motives which actuated her were of the very best and noblest; the means were, on the face of it, shady. She was obliged to open a certain missionary-box, and to extract from its depths a sovereign. That sovereign was the first step in the recovery of the Professor to the paths of health. Miss Clarissa was terribly unhappy about that sovereign, and matters followed which gave her mother considerable annoyance and distress. Miss Clarissa did wrong that right might come; she will doubtless explain more fully to her mother all her motives in a private interview. I think my part is done. I extremely respect this young person, who has restored to the world the man I most love and most honour. I only regret, for my own sake, that I had neither part nor lot in the matter; but I think I have put a few things straight.—Is not that so, Nonentity?

But come, I must catch my train. Come, Nonentity, help me to get off.'

Before any one could prevent him, Professor Sarson had seized Janet's hand and dashed out of the room, his shabby coat minus a button at the back being the last the assembled guests saw of him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

QUITE IN THE GOOD OLD STYLE.

TO explain the astonishment of all present would be to attempt the impossible. As to Thomas Jenkins, he wrung Clarissa's hand so often that it quite ached. When she turned from him it was to be clasped in her father's arms, who did not say a word, but just kissed her once solemnly; and then her mother took her and kissed her twice, and said, 'You will explain that matter of the sovereign to me presently. God bless you, my dear! But why did you not trust me? That is my one word of reproach to you.'

As to Clarissa, she scarcely knew herself. A great burden was lifted, the whole truth was known, and nobody had risen up to scold her. On the contrary, people began to think she had done a fine thing, in especial Thomas Jenkins had praised her; in fact, he could not say too much. 'You and I,' he said, 'are as sympathetic as though we were uncle and niece in reality, which for my part I sincerely wish we were; you adore your father something as I adore the memory of my beloved mother. Shake hands, Miss Clare; you have made me a happy man once more.'

'Then, if you are happy, will you do something for Martha?' said Clarissa suddenly.

'For Martha—eh! what?'

'I think I must have a say in this,' suddenly exclaimed Hannah Price, who up to the present had not spoken. 'I wish to goodness, Thomas,' she continued, 'that you would let me have that lass as well as Martha, to initiate into the mysteries of baking and brewing and preserving, and such like matters, for a year and more.'

'Not a bit of it, Hannah—not a bit of it,' said Thomas Jenkins. 'I have changed all my views. I want Martha to be as much as possible with Clarissa; for so fine a girl—a girl with such an admiration for her father, such a worship of him, such a determination to help him at any cost—ought to be the best possible companion to my own niece. I must have a talk with Professor Rodney to-morrow. Those two girls must become closer friends than ever; and if the Professor will allow me to repair the injustice I have done to his daughter, even in my thoughts, by helping with her education and smoothing her path in the world in the future, I shall be more than grateful.'

'Time enough for that, Mr Jenkins,' said the Professor. 'You must remember that Clarissa is my girl; but we all appreciate your friendship, and will be glad to see you at our house; and Clarissa may visit Martha as often as you like to invite her.'

'Yes, Mr Jenkins; and you must forgive me,' said Mrs Rodney, to the great surprise of Jenkins at that moment. 'I misunderstood you; but if you feel to your dead mother in any way as my child felt to her father, I cannot but respect you.'

'Dear! dear! It is worth having a pile after all,' muttered Jenkins to himself. 'When the high-falutin folk are nice, they are very nice indeed.—I say, Polly,' he said, turning to his sister, 'I am a happy man again. The action of that dear little Miss Clare was magnificent.'

'There is one person you are all forgetting,' here suddenly exclaimed Sir John Carbery, who had been silent during all this little scene, 'and that is the young lady whom my new friend Professor Sarson calls Little Miss Nonentity. But for her interference a cloud might have come between several good people, and the girl whose fortunes I shall always follow with deep interest, Miss Clarissa Rodney, might not have been so happily cleared even from the suspicion of blame. The only thing I have to say to you, Miss Clarissa, in the future is this, that if you want a friend you have but to apply to me. I like girls with stuff in them; I like girls who can act on an emergency. I am only sorry that in your trouble you did not see sufficiently into my character to know that I would have helped you, and not allowed you to go through all this misery; but, on the other hand, I respect that sturdy side of you which would do anything rather than break a bond solemnly given. I trust, Miss Clarissa, when you are old enough you will adopt the profession of nursing; an admirable nurse you would make, and I should recommend you to many patients. And now, good-bye, good-bye to you all. God bless you, Miss Clarissa.'

Sir John Carbery vanished almost as suddenly as Professor Sarson, and soon afterwards Jenkins, Mrs

Moore, Martha, and Hannah Price also left the Rodneys' house.

Clarissa, Janet, and her father and mother were alone.

'Well, this is an astonishing day,' said Mrs Rodney. 'I presume then, Clarissa, that you knew about my note-book?'

'I burnt it, mother,' said Clare, hanging her head, her face crimson.

'It was really an extremely wrong thing to do; but you have been praised and flattered all round, and you have saved your father's life. You did wrong that good might come; your great mistake, dear, was in not trusting me. But, there, child—God bless you; and God bless my little Janet! We are a happy quartette now; and but for you, Clarissa, we might'—— But here Mrs Rodney's words failed her; she burst into tears, flung her arms round the Professor's neck, and sobbed on his shoulder.

'Oh, Clare!' said Little Nonentity afterwards, 'was not Professor Sarson splendid? And it was I thought of it all.'

'Yes, yes; you are not a bit like a "nonentity,"' said Clarissa, hugging her sister as she spoke.

THE END.

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